

BEN-HUR



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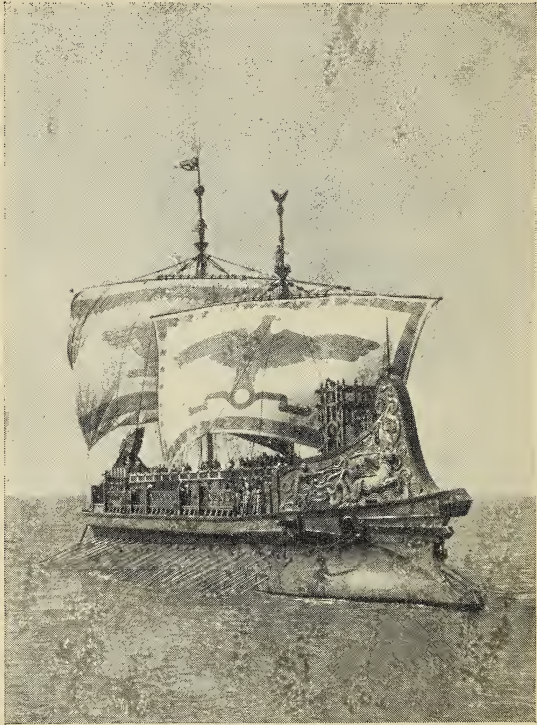
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BEN - HUR

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"SPEEDING THROUGH THE IONIAN SEA"

[See page 51

BEN-HUR

BY

LEW WALLACE

Adapted for use in Schools by

ELIZABETH D'OYLEY

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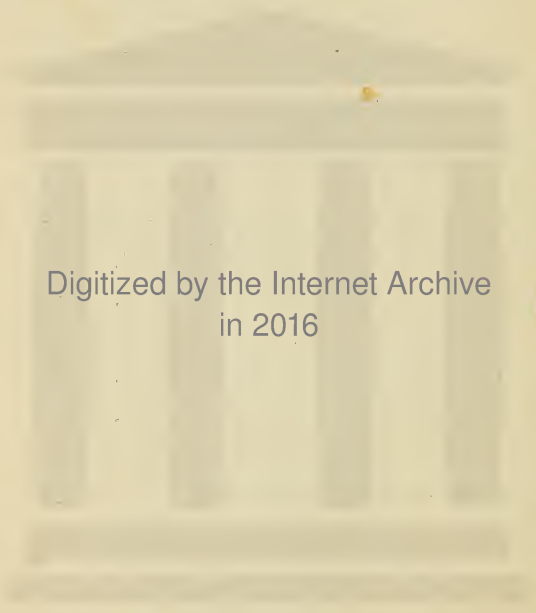
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BEN-HUR

CHAPTER I

ROME AND JUDEA

IT was the year of Our Lord 21; in the little village of Nazareth lived Jesus, Son of Mary; and Valerius Gratus, representing the mighty power of Rome, ruled as Governor in Judea.

[One year after the birth of Christ, Herod the Great had died,] and Cæsar, not content with deposing his son and successor, Archelaus, struck the people of Jerusalem in a manner that touched their pride keenly. He reduced Judea to a Roman province, and annexed it to Syria. So, instead of a king ruling royally from the palace left by Herod on Mount Zion, the city fell into the hands of an officer of the second grade, who was called procurator, and who communicated with the court in Rome through the Legate of Syria, living in Antioch. To make the hurt more painful, the procurator was not permitted to establish himself in Jerusalem; Cæsarea was his seat of government.

In this rain of sorrows, one consolation only remained to the fallen people: the high priest

occupied the Herodian palace in the market-place. What his authority really was, however it is easy to see. Judgment of life and death was retained by the procurator. Justice was administered in the name and according to the laws of Rome.

Judea had been a Roman province eighty years and more—ample time for the Cæsars to study the character of the people—time enough, at least, to learn that the Jew, with all his pride, could be quietly governed if his religion were respected. The predecessors of Gratus had carefully abstained from interfering with any of the sacred observances of their subjects. But he chose a different course: almost his first official act was to expel Hannas from the high-priesthood, and give the place to Ishmael, son of Fabus.

Now Hannas, the idol of his party, had used his power faithfully in the interest of his imperial patron. A Roman garrison held the Tower of Antonia; a Roman guard kept the gates of the palace; a Roman judge dispensed justice, civil and criminal; a Roman system of taxation, mercilessly executed, crushed both city and country; daily, hourly, and in a thousand ways, the people were bruised and galled, and taught the difference between a life of independence and a life of subjection; yet Hannas kept them in comparative quiet. Rome had no truer friend; and he made his loss instantly felt.

A month after Ishmael took the office, Valerius Gratus found it necessary to visit him in Jerusalem. When from the walls, hooting and hissing him, the Jews beheld his

guard enter the north gate of the city, and march to the Tower of Antonia, they understood the real purpose of the visit—a full cohort of legionaries was added to the former garrison, and the keys of their yoke could now be tightened with impunity. If the procurator thought it important to make an example, alas for the first offender!

CHAPTER II

MESSALA AND JUDAH

I

WITH the foregoing explanation in-mind, the reader is invited to look into one of the gardens of the palace on Mount Zion. The time was noonday in the middle of July, when the heat of summer was at its highest.

Beside a small pool of clear water nourishing a clump of cane and oleander, unmindful of the sun shining full upon them in the breathless air, two boys, one about nineteen, the other seventeen, sat engaged in earnest conversation.

They were both handsome, and, at first glance, would have been pronounced brothers. Both had hair and eyes black; and faces deeply browned. The elder was bareheaded. A loose tunic, dropping to the knees, was his attire complete, except sandals and a light-blue mantle spread under him on the seat. The costume left his arms and legs bare, and they were brown as the face; nevertheless, a certain grace of manner, refinement of features, and cultured voice decided his rank. The tunic, of softest woollen, grey-tinted, at the neck, sleeves, and edge of the skirt bordered with red, and bound

to the waist by a tasselled silken cord, certified him the Roman he was.

The companion of Messala was slighter in form: his garments were of fine white linen, and a cloth covered his head, held by a yellow cord, and arranged so as to fall away from the forehead down low over the back of the neck. Anyone, studying his features more than his costume, would have soon discovered him to be of Jewish descent.

The forehead of the Roman was high and narrow, his nose sharp and aquiline, while his lips were thin and straight, and his eyes cold and close under the brows. The brow of the Israelite, on the other hand, was low and broad; his nose long, with wide nostrils; his upper lip, slightly shading the lower one, short and curving to the dimpled corners, like a Cupid's bow; points which, in connection with the round chin, full eyes, and oval cheeks, reddened with a wine-like glow, gave his face the softness, strength, and beauty peculiar to his race.

"Did you not say the new procurator is to arrive to-morrow?"

The question came from the younger of the friends, and was made in Greek, at the time, singularly enough, the language commonly used in the politer circles of Judea.

"Yes, to-morrow," Messala answered. "I heard Ishmael, the new governor in the palace—you call him high priest—tell my father so last night, but, to make quite certain, I saw a centurion from the Tower this morning, and he told me preparations were going on for the reception.

Our farewell took place in this garden," resumed the boy after a short pause. "'The peace of the Lord go with you!'—your last words. 'The gods keep you!' I said. Do you remember? How many years have passed since then?"

"Five," answered the Jew, gazing into the water.

"Well, you have reason to be thankful to—whom shall I say? The gods? No matter. You have grown handsome; the Greeks would call you beautiful. Tell me, my Judah, how the coming of the procurator is of such interest to you."

Judah bent his large eyes upon the questioner; the gaze was grave and thoughtful, and caught the Roman's, and held it while he replied: "Yes, five years. I remember the parting; you went to Rome; I saw you start, and cried, for I loved you. The years are gone, and you have come back to me accomplished and princely—I do not jest; and yet—yet—I wish you were the Messala you went away."

The fine nostril of the other stirred, and he put on a longer drawl as he said: "What an oracle you would make, my Judah! A few lessons from my teacher of rhetoric hard by the Forum—I will give you a letter to him when you become wise enough to accept a suggestion which I am reminded to make you—a little practice of the art of mystery, and Delphi will receive you as Apollo himself. Seriously, O my friend, in what am I not the Messala I went away?"

The lad reddened under the cynical look to which he was subjected; yet he replied firmly:

“You have made good use, I see, of your opportunities; from your teachers you have brought away much knowledge and many graces. You talk with the ease of a master; yet your speech carries a sting. My Messala, when he went away, had no poison in his nature; not for the world would he have hurt the feelings of a friend.”

The Roman smiled as if complimented, and raised his patrician head a toss higher.

“Oh my solemn Judah, drop the oracular, and be plain. Wherein have I hurt you?”

The other drew a long breath, and said, pulling at the cord about his waist: “In five years, I, too, have learned somewhat. Simeon and Sham-mai are no doubt inferior to your master hard by the Forum. Their learning goes not out into forbidden paths; those who sit at their feet arise enriched simply with knowledge of God, the law, and Israel; and the effect is love and reverence for everything that belongs to them. Attendance at the Great College, and study of what I heard there, have taught me that Judea is not as she used to be. I know the space that lies between an independent kingdom and the petty province Judea is. I were meaner, viler, than a Samaritan not to resent the degradation of my country. Ishmael is not lawfully high priest, and he cannot be while the noble Hannas lives; yet——”

Messala broke in upon him with a biting laugh.

“Oh, I understand you now! Ishmael, you say, is a usurper. Ye Gods! what it is to be a Jew! All men and things, even heaven and

earth, change; but a Jew never. To him there is no backward, no forward; he is what his ancestor was in the beginning. In this sand I draw you a circle—there! Now tell me what more a Jew's life is? Round and round, Abraham here, Isaac and Jacob yonder, God in the middle. And the circle—by the master of all thunders! the circle is too large. I draw it again——”

He stooped, put his thumb upon the ground, and swept the fingers about it.

“See, the thumb spot is the Temple, the finger-lines Judea. Outside the little space is there nothing of value! The arts! Herod was a builder; therefore he is accursed. Painting, sculpture! to look upon them is sin. Poetry you make fast to your altars. Except in the synagogue, who of you attempts eloquence? In war all you conquer in the six days you lose on the seventh. Such your life and limit; who shall say no if I laugh at you? Satisfied with the worship of such a people, what is your God to our Roman Jove, who lends us his eagles that we may compass the universe with our arms? Hillel, Simeon, Shammai—what are they to the masters who teach that everything is worth knowing that can be known?”

II

The Jew arose, his face much flushed.

“No, no; keep your place, my Judah, keep your place,” Messala cried, extending his hand.

“You mock me.”

“Nay! Listen a little further! Directly”—the Roman smiled derisively—“directly I will make an end of serious speech. I am mindful of your goodness in walking from the old house of your fathers to welcome me back and renew the love of our childhood—if we can. ‘Go,’ said my teacher, in his last lecture—‘Go, and, to make your lives great, remember Mars reigns and Eros has found his eyes.’ He meant love is nothing, war everything. It is so in Rome. The world is going the same way; so, as to our future, down Eros, up Mars! I am to be a soldier; and you, O my Judah, I pity you; what can you be?”

The Jew moved nearer the pool; Messala’s drawl deepened.

“Yes, I pity you, my fine Judah. From the college to the synagogue; then to the Temple; then—oh, a crowning glory!—the seat in the Sanhedrin. A life without opportunities; the gods help you! But I——”

Judah looked at him in time to see the flush of pride that kindled in his haughty face as he went on.

“But I—ah, the world is not all conquered. The sea has islands unseen. In the north there are nations yet unvisited. The glory of completing Alexander’s march to the Far East remains to some one. See what chances lie before a Roman.”

Next instant he resumed his drawl.

“A campaign into Africa; another after the Scythian; then—a legion! Most careers end

there; but not mine. *I will give up my legion for a prefecture! Think of life in Rome with money—money, wine, games! Such a rounding of life may be—a fat prefecture, and it is mine. O my Judah, here is Syria! Judea is rich; Antioch a capital for the gods. I will succeed Cyrenius, and you—shall share my fortune.*”

“There are a few, I have heard, who can afford to make a jest of their future; you convince me, O my Messala, that I am not one of them,” Judah retorted.

The Roman studied him, then replied: “Why not the truth as well in a jest as in a parable?”

“Then you were not merely jesting?”

“My Judah, I see I did not offer you enough,” the Roman answered quickly, his eyes sparkling. “When I am prefect, with Judea to enrich me, I—will make you high priest.”

The Jew turned off angrily.

“Do not leave me,” said Messala.

The other hesitated.

“Gods, Judah, how hot the sun shines!” cried the patrician, observing his perplexity. “Let us seek a shade.”

Judah answered coldly:

“We had better part. I wish I had not come. I sought a friend and find a——”

“Roman,” said Messala, quickly.

The hands of the Jew clenched, but controlling himself again, he started off. Messala arose, and taking the mantle from the bench, flung it over his shoulder, and followed after; when he gained his side, he put his hand upon his shoulder and walked with him.

“This is the way—my hand thus—we used to walk when we were children. Let us keep it as far as the gate. You are a boy; I am a man; let me talk like one.”

His complacency was superb. When they had gone a few yards, the Roman spoke again.

“I think you can hear me now, especially as what I have to say concerns yourself. I would serve you, O handsome as Ganymede; I would serve you with real goodwill. I love you—all I can. I told you I meant to be a soldier. Why not you also? Why not you step out of the narrow circle which, as I have shown, is all of noble life your laws and customs allow?”

Judah made no reply.

“Who are the wise men of our day?” Messala continued. “Not they who waste their years quarrelling about dead things; about philosophies and religions. Give me one great name, O Judah; I care not where you go to find it—to Rome, Egypt, the East, or here in Jerusalem—Pluto take me if it belong not to a man who wrought his fame out of the material furnished him by the present; holding nothing sacred that did not contribute to the end, scorning nothing that did! How was it with Herod? How with the first and second Cæsars? Imitate them. Begin now. And Rome will help you.”

The Jewish lad trembled with rage; and, as the garden gate was close by, he quickened his steps, eager to escape.

“O Rome, Rome,” he muttered.

“Be wise,” continued Messala. “Give up the follies of Moses and the traditions; see the

situation as it is. Dare look the Fates in the face, and they will tell you, Rome is the world. Ask them of Judea, and they will answer, She is what Rome wills."

They were now at the gate. Judah stopped, and took the hand gently from his shoulder, and faced Messala, tears trembling in his eyes.

"I understand you, because you are a Roman; you cannot understand me—I am an Israelite. You have given me suffering to-day by convincing me that we can never be the friends we have been—never! Here we part. The peace of the God of my fathers abide with you!"

Messala offered him his hand; the Jew walked on through the gateway. When he was gone, the Roman was silent awhile; then he, too, passed through, saying to himself, with a toss of the head:

"Be it so. Eros is dead. Mars reigns!"

CHAPTER III

JUDAH'S HOME

FROM that entrance to the Holy City, which to-day is called St. Stephen's Gate, a street extended westwardly, on a line parallel with the northern front of the Tower of Antonia, through a square from that famous castle. Keeping the course as far as the Tyropœon Valley, which it followed a little way south, it turned and again ran west until a short distance beyond what tradition tells us was the Judgment Gate, from whence it broke abruptly south.

In the angle thus formed, there stood a house fronting north and west, two stories in height, and perfectly quadrangular. The street on the west side was about twelve feet wide, that on the north not more than ten; so that one walking close to the walls, and looking up at them, would have been struck by the rude, unfinished, uninviting, but strong and imposing appearance they presented; for they were of stone laid in large blocks, undressed—on the outer side, in fact, just as they were taken from the quarry.

Not long after the young Jew parted from the Roman, he stopped before the western gate of

this house, and knocked. The wicket (a door hung in one of the valves of the gate) was opened to admit him. He stepped in hastily, and failed to acknowledge the low salaam of the porter.

The passage into which he was admitted appeared not unlike a narrow tunnel with panelled walls and pitted ceiling. There were benches of stone on both sides, stained and polished by long use. Twelve or fifteen steps carried him into a courtyard. The servants coming and going along the terraces; the noise of millstones grinding; the chickens and pigeons in full enjoyment of the place; the goats, cows, donkeys, and horses stabled in the outbuildings; a massive trough of water, apparently for the common use, declared this court to be a part of the domestic management of the owner.

Clearing another passage, the young man entered a second court, spacious, square, and set with shrubbery and vines, kept fresh and beautiful by water from a basin erected near a porch on the north side. A flight of steps on the south ascended to the terraces of the upper story, over which great awnings were stretched as a defence against the sun. Another stairway reached from the terrace to the roof, the edge of which, all around the square, was defined by a sculptured cornice, and a parapet of burned-clay tiling, sexangular and bright red.

A few steps within the second court, the lad turned to the right, and, choosing a walk through the shrubbery, part of which was in flower, passed to the stairway, and ascended to the terrace. Making way under the awning to a

doorway on the north side, he entered an apartment which the dropping of the screen behind him returned to darkness. Nevertheless he proceeded, moving over a tiled floor to a divan, upon which he flung himself, face downwards, and lay at rest, his forehead upon his crossed arms.

About nightfall a woman came to the door and called; he answered, and she went in.

“Supper is over, and it is night. Is not my son hungry?” she asked.

“No,” he replied.

“Are you sick?”

“I am sleepy.”

“Your mother has asked for you.”

“Where is she?”

“In the summer-house on the roof.”

He stirred himself, and sat up.

“Very well. Bring me something to eat. What you please, Amrah. I am not sick, but indifferent. Life does not seem as pleasant as it did this morning. A new ailment, O my Amrah; and you who know me so well, who never failed me, may think of the things now that answer for food and medicine. Bring me what you choose.”

She laid her hand upon his forehead; then, as satisfied, went out, saying: “I will see.”

After a while she returned, bearing on a wooden platter a bowl of milk, some thin cakes of white bread broken, a delicate paste of brayed wheat, a bird broiled, and honey and salt. On one end of the platter there was a silver goblet full of wine, on the other a brazen hand-lamp

lighted. Drawing a stool to the divan, she placed the platter upon it, then knelt close by ready to serve him. Her face was that of a woman of fifty, dark-skinned, dark-eyed, and at that moment softened by a look of tenderness almost maternal. She was a slave, of Egyptian origin—a slave, moreover, who would not have accepted freedom, for the boy she was attending was her life. She had nursed him through babyhood, tended him as a child, and could not break the service. To her love he could never be a man.

He spoke but once during the meal.

“You remember, O my Amrah,” he said, “the Messala who used to visit me here days at a time.”

“I remember him.”

“He went to Rome some years ago, and is now back. I called upon him to-day.”

A shudder of disgust seized the lad.

“I knew something had happened,” she said, deeply interested. “I never liked the Messala. Tell me all.”

But he fell into musing, and to her repeated enquiries only said: “He is much changed, and I shall have nothing more to do with him.”

When Amrah took the platter away, he also went out, and up from the terrace to the roof, walking slowly across the house-top to a tower built over the north-west corner of the palace. He entered, passing under a half-raised curtain. The interior was all darkness, except that on four sides there were arched openings like doorways, through which the sky, lighted with stars,

was visible. In one of the openings, reclining against a cushion upon a divan, he saw the figure of a woman, indistinct even in white floating drapery. At the sound of his steps upon the floor, the fan in her hand stopped, glistening where the starlight struck the jewels with which it was sprinkled, and she sat up, and called his name.

“Judah, my son!”

“It is I, Mother,” he answered, quickening his approach.

Going to her, he knelt, and she put her arms around him, and with kisses pressed him to her bosom.

CHAPTER IV

JUDAH'S MOTHER

I

THE mother resumed her easy position against the cushion, while the son took his place on the divan, his head in her lap. Both of them, looking out of the opening, could see a stretch of lower house-tops, a bank of blue-blackness over in the west which they knew to be mountains, and the sky, its shadowy depths brilliant with stars. The city was still. Only the winds stirred.

“Amrah tells me something has happened to you,” she said, caressing his cheek. “When my Judah was a child, I allowed small things to trouble him, but he is now a man. He must not forget”—her voice became very soft—“that one day he is to be my hero.”

She spoke in the language almost lost in the land, but which a few—and they were always as rich in blood as in possessions—cherished in its purity, that they might be more certainly distinguished from the Gentile peoples—the language in which the loved Rebekah and Rachel sang to Benjamin.

The words appeared to set him thinking anew;

after a while, however, he caught the hand with which she fanned him, and said: "To-day, O my mother, I have been made to think of many things that never had place in my mind before. Tell me first, what am I to be?"

"Have I not told you? You are to be my hero."

He could not see her face, yet he knew she was in play. He became more serious.

"You are very good, very kind, O my mother. No one will ever love me as you do. I think I understand why you would have me put off the question," he continued. "Thus far my life has belonged to you. But it is the Lord's will that I shall one day become owner of myself. I will be your hero, but you must put me in the way. You know the law—every son of Israel must have some occupation. Shall I tend the herds? or till the soil? or drive the saw? or be a clerk or lawyer? What shall I be? Dear, good mother help me to an answer."

"Gamaliel has been lecturing to-day," she said thoughtfully.

"If so, I did not hear him."

"Then you have been walking with Simeon, who, they tell me, inherits the genius of the family."

"No, I have not seen him. I have been up on the Market-place, not to the Temple. I visited the young Messala."

A certain change in his voice attracted his mother's attention. A presentiment quickened the beating of her heart; the fan became motionless again.

“The Messala!” she said. “What could he say to trouble you so?”

“He is very much changed.”

“You mean he has come back a Roman.”

“Yes.”

“Roman!” she continued, half to herself. “To all the world the word means master. How long has he been away?”

“Five years.”

She raised her head, and looked off into the night. Then, full of thought, she settled back into her easy place. He was the first to speak.

“What Messala said, my mother, was sharp enough in itself; but, taken with the manner, some of the sayings were unbearable.”

“I think I understand you. Rome, her poets, orators, senators, courtiers, are mad with affectation of what they call satire.”

“I suppose all great peoples are proud,” he went on, scarcely noticing the interruption; “but the pride of that people is unlike all others; in these latter days it is so grown, the gods barely escape it.”

“The gods escape!” said the mother, quickly. “More than one Roman has accepted worship as his divine right.”

“Well, Messala always had his share of the disagreeable quality. When he was a child I have seen him mock strangers whom even Herod condescended to receive with honours; yet he always spared Judea. To-day for the first time, he trifled with our customs and God. As you would have had me do, I parted with

him finally. And now, O my dear mother, I would know with more certainty if there be just ground for the Roman's contempt."

He straightened himself suddenly, his voice quivering with anger.

"In what am I his inferior? Is ours a lower order of people? Why should I, even in Cæsar's presence, feel the shrinking of a slave? Tell me especially why, if I have the soul, and so choose, I may not hunt the honours of the world in all its fields? Why may not I take sword and indulge the passion of war? As a poet, why may not I sing of all themes? I can be a worker in metals, a keeper of flocks, a merchant; why not an artist like the Greek? Tell me, O my mother—and this is the sum of my trouble—why may not a son of Israel do all a Roman may?"

The mother sat up, and in a voice quick and sharp as his own, replied: "I see, I see! From association Messala, in boyhood, was almost a Jew; but the years of Rome have been too much for him. I do not wonder at the change; yet"—her voice fell—"he might have dealt tenderly at least with you."

Her hand dropped lightly upon his forehead, and the fingers caught in his hair and lingered there lovingly, while her eyes sought the highest stars in view. Her pride responded to his, not merely in echo, but in the unison of perfect sympathy. She would answer him; at the same time, not for the world would she have had the answer unsatisfactory; an admission of inferiority might weaken his spirit for

life. She faltered with misgivings of her own powers.

“What you propose, O my Judah, is not a subject for treatment by a woman. Let me put its consideration off till to-morrow, and I will have the wise Simeon——”

“Do not send me to the rector,” he said abruptly.

“I will have him come to us.”

“No, I seek more than information; while he might give me that better than you, O my mother, you can do better by giving me what he cannot—the resolution which is the soul of a man’s soul.”

She swept the heavens with a rapid glance, trying to compass all the meaning of his questions.

Then, speaking to herself rather than to him, she began.

II

“Take heart, O my son. The Messala is nobly descended; his family has been illustrious through many generations. Yet if to-day your friend boasted of his ancestry, you might have shamed him by recounting yours. There is verity in our Books of Generations; and, following them back to the Captivity, back to the foundation of the first Temple, back to the march from Egypt, we have absolute assurance that you are lineally sprung from Hur, the companion of Joshua.”

There was silence for a time in the chamber on the roof.

“I thank you, O my mother,” Judah next said, clasping both her hands in his, “I thank you with all my heart. Yet to make a family truly noble, is time alone enough?”

“Ah, you forget, you forget; our claim rests not merely upon time; the Lord’s preference is our especial glory. Under the trampling of the Romans the earth trembles like a floor beaten with flails. Along with the rest we are fallen—alas that I should say it to you, my son! They have our highest places, and the holiest, and the end no man can tell; but this I know—they may reduce Judea as an almond broken with hammers, and devour Jerusalem, which is the oil and sweetness thereof; yet the glory of the men of Israel will remain!

“For their history is the history of God, who wrote with their hands, spake with their tongues, and was Himself in all the good they did, even the least; who dwelt with them, a Lawgiver on Sinai, a Guide in the wilderness, in war a Captain, in government a King; who once and again pushed back the curtains of the pavilion which is His resting-place, and, as a man speaking to men, showed them the right, and the way to happiness, and how they should live, and made them promises binding the strength of his Almightyness with covenants sworn to everlasting.

“O my son, could it be that they with whom Jehovah thus dwelt, derived nothing from Him?—that in their lives and deeds the common human qualities should not in some degree have been mixed and coloured with

the divine! that their genius should not have in it, even after the lapse of ages, some little of heaven? Thrice blessed, O our fathers, servants of God, keepers of the covenants! Ye are the leaders of men, the living and the dead. The front is thine, and though every Roman were a Cæsar, ye shall not lose it!"

Judah was deeply stirred.

"Do not stop, I pray you," he cried. "You make me hear the sound of timbrels. I wait for Miriam and the women who went after her dancing and singing."

She caught his feeling, and, with ready wit, wove it into her speech.

"Very well, my son, if you can hear the timbrel of the prophetess, use your fancy, and stand with me, as if by the wayside, while the chosen of Israel pass us at the head of the procession. Now they come—the patriarchs first; next the fathers of the tribes. I almost hear the bells of their camels and the lowing of their herds. Who is he that walks alone between the companies? An old man, yet his eye is not dim, nor his natural force abated. He knew the Lord face to face! Warrior, poet, orator, law-giver, prophet, his greatness is as the sun at morning, its flood of splendour quenching all other lights, even that of the first and noblest of the Cæsars.

"After him come the judges. And then the kings—the son of Jesse, a hero in war, and a singer of songs eternal as that of the sea; and his son, who, passing all other kings in riches and wisdom, and while making the Desert



“ I WAS LISTENING TO A NEW SONG OF ISRAEL ”

habitable, and in its waste places planting cities, forgot not Jerusalem which the Lord had chosen for His seat on earth.

“Bend lower, my son! These that come next are the first of their kind, and the last. Their faces are raised, as if they heard a voice in the sky and were listening. Harken to a woman among them—‘Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously!’ Nay, put your forehead in the dust before them! They were tongues of God, His servants, who looked through heaven, and, seeing all the future, wrote what they saw, and left the writing to be proven by time. Kings turned pale as they approached them, and nations trembled at the sound of their voices. See the Tishbite and his servant Elisha! And yonder—O my son, kiss the dust again!—yonder the gentle son of Amos, from whom the world has its promise of the Messiah to come!”

In this passage the fan had been kept in rapid play; it stopped now, and her voice sank low.

“You are tired,” she said.

“No,” he replied, “I was listening to a new song of Israel.”

The mother was still intent upon her purpose, and passed the pleasant speech.

“In such a light as I could, my Judah, I have set our great men before you—patriarchs, legislators, warriors, singers, prophets. Turn we to the best of Rome. Against Moses place Cæsar, and Tarquin against David; the best of the consuls against the judges; Augustus against Solomon, and you are done: comparison ends

there. But think then of the prophets—greatest of the great. Finally, O my Judah—if such speech be reverent—how shall we judge Jehovah and Jupiter unless it be by what their servants have done in their names? And as for what you shall do——”

She spoke the latter words slowly, and with a tremulous utterance.

“As for what you shall do, my boy—serve the Lord, the Lord God of Israel, not Rome. For a child of Abraham there is no glory except in the Lord’s ways, and in them there is much glory.”

“I may be a soldier then?” Judah asked.

“Why not? Did not Moses call God a man of war?”

There was then a long silence in the summer chamber.

“You have my permission,” she said finally; “if only you serve the Lord instead of Cæsar.”

He was content with the condition, and by and by fell asleep. She arose then, and put the cushion under his head, and, throwing a shawl over him and kissing him tenderly, went away.

CHAPTER V

THE ACCIDENT

I

WHEN Judah awoke the sun was up over the mountains; the pigeons were abroad in flocks, filling the air with the gleams of their white wings; to the south-east he beheld the Temple, a gleam of gold in the blue of the sky. Upon the edge of the divan, close by him, a girl scarcely fifteen sat singing to the accompaniment of a *nebel*,¹ which she rested upon her knee, and touched gracefully. To her he turned listening; and this was what she sang:

“Wake not, but hear me, love!
Adrift, adrift, on slumber’s sea,
Thy spirit call to list to me.
Wake not, but hear me, love!
A gift from Sleep, the restful king,
All happy, happy dreams I bring.

“Wake not, but hear me, love!
Of all the world of dreams ’t is thine
This once to choose the most divine.
So choose, and sleep, my love!
But ne’er again in choice be free,
Unless, unless—you dream of me.”

¹ A Hebrew instrument, something like a harp.

She put the instrument down, and, resting her hands in her lap, waited for him to speak.

"Very pretty, my Tirzah, very pretty!" he said, warmly.

"The song?" she asked.

"Yes—and the singer, too. It has the conceit of a Greek. Where did you get it?"

"You remember the Greek who sang in the theatre last month? They said he used to be a singer at the court for Herod and his sister Salome. I got the song from him."

"But he sang in Greek."

"And I in Hebrew."

"Ah, yes! I am proud of my little sister. Have you another as good?"

"Very many. But let them go now. Amrah sent me to tell you she will bring you your breakfast, and that you need not come down. She should be here by this time. She thinks you sick—that a dreadful accident happened to you yesterday. What was it? Tell me, and I will help Amrah doctor you. She knows the cures of the Egyptians, who were always a stupid set; but I have a great many recipes of the Arabs, who——"

"Are even more stupid than the Egyptians," he said, shaking his head. "What do you think, Tirzah?—I am going away."

She dropped her hands with amazement.

"Going away? When? Where? For what?"

He laughed.

"Three questions, all in a breath!" Next instant he became serious. "You know the

law requires me to follow some occupation. Our good father set me an example. Even you would despise me if I spent in idleness the results of his industry and knowledge. I am going to Rome."

The brightness faded from her face.

"But—must you go? Here in Jerusalem you can learn all that is needed to be a merchant, and what else can you be?"

"A soldier," he replied, with a certain pride of voice.

Tears came into her eyes.

"You will be killed."

"If God's will, be it so. But, Tirzah, the soldiers are not all killed."

She threw her arms around his neck, as if to hold him back.

"We are so happy! Stay at home, my brother."

"Home cannot always be what it is. You yourself will be going away before long."

"Never!"

He smiled at her earnestness.

"A prince of Judah, or some other of one of the tribes, will come soon and claim my Tirzah, and ride away with her, to be the light of another house. What will then become of me? War is a trade," he continued more soberly. "To learn it thoroughly, one must go to school, and there is no school like a Roman camp."

"You would not fight for Rome?" she asked, holding her breath.

"And you—even you hate her. The whole world hates her. In that, O Tirzah, find the

reason of the answer I give you—Yes, I will fight for her, if, in return, she will teach me how one day to fight against her—— Hist! Here comes Amrah. Do not let her know of what I am thinking.”

The faithful slave came in with breakfast, and placed the waiter holding it upon a stool before them; then, with white napkins upon her arm, she remained to serve them. They dipped their fingers in a bowl of water, and were rinsing them, when a noise caught their attention—a sound of martial music in the street on the north side of the house.

“Soldiers from the Prætorium! I must see them,” he cried, springing from the divan, and running out.

In a moment more he was leaning over the parapet of tiles which guarded the roof at the extreme north-east corner, so absorbed that he did not notice Tirzah by his side, resting one hand upon his shoulder.

Their position commanded the house-tops eastward as far as the huge irregular Tower of Antonia, now the citadel of the Roman garrison and military head-quarters for the governor. The street, not more than ten feet wide, was spanned here and there by bridges, open and covered, which, like the roofs along the way, were beginning to be occupied by men, women, and children, called out by the uproar of trumpets so delightful to the soldiers.

The array after a while came into view of the two upon the house of the Hurs. First, a

vanguard of the light-armed—mostly slingers and bowmen—marching with wide intervals between their ranks and files; next, a body of heavy-armed infantry, bearing large shields, and spears; then the musicians; and then an officer riding along, but followed closely by a guard of cavalry; after them again, a column of infantry also heavy-armed, which, moving in close order, crowded the street from wall to wall, and appeared to be without end.

The brawny limbs of the men; the even swing from right to left of the shields; the sparkle of scales, buckles, and breast-plates and helms, all perfectly burnished; the plumes nodding above the tall crests; the sway of ensigns and iron-shod spears; the bold, confident step, exactly timed; the look, so grave, yet so watchful; the machine-like unity of the whole moving mass—made an impression upon Judah, but as something felt rather than seen. Two objects fixed his attention—the eagle of the legion first—a gilded effigy perched on a tall shaft, with wings outspread until they met above his head. He knew that, when brought from its chamber in the Tower, it had been received with divine honours.

The officer riding alone in the midst of the column was the other attraction. His head was bare; otherwise he was in full armour. At his left hip he wore a short sword; in his hand, however, he carried a staff, which looked like a roll of white paper. He sat upon a purple cloth instead of a saddle, and that, and a bridle with a frontlet of gold and reins of yellow silk

broadly fringed at the lower edge, completed the housings of the horse.

While the man was yet in the distance, Judah observed that his presence was sufficient to throw the people looking at him into angry excitement. They would lean over the parapets or stand boldly out, and shake their fists at him; they followed him with loud cries, and spit at him as he passed under the bridges; the women even flung their sandals, sometimes with such good effect as to hit him. When he was nearer, the yells became distinguishable—"Robber, tyrant, dog of a Roman! Away with Ishmael! Give us back our Hannas!"

When quite near, Judah could see that, as was but natural, the man did not share the indifference so superbly shown by the soldiers; his face was dark and sullen, and the glances he occasionally cast at his persecutors were full of menace; the very timid shrank from them.

Now the lad had heard of the custom, borrowed from a habit of the first Cæsar, by which chief commanders, to indicate their rank, appeared in public with only a laurel vine upon their heads. By that sign he knew this officer—*Valerius Gratus, the New Procurator of Judea!*

II

To say truth now, the Roman under the unprovoked storm had the young Jew's sympathy; so that when he reached the corner of the house, the latter leaned yet farther over the parapet to

see him go by, and in the act rested a hand upon a tile which had been a long time cracked and allowed to go unnoticed. The pressure was strong enough to displace the outer piece, which started to fall. A thrill of horror shot through the youth. He reached out to catch it. In appearance the motion was exactly that of one pitching something from him. The effort failed—nay, it served to push the descending fragment farther out over the way. He shouted with all his might. The soldiers of the guard looked up; so did the great man, and in that moment the tile struck him, and he fell from his seat as dead.

The cohort halted; the guards leaped from their horses, and hastened to cover the chief with their shields. On the other hand, the people who witnessed the affair, never doubting that the blow had been purposely dealt, cheered the lad as he yet stooped in full view over the parapet, horrified by what he beheld, and by the thought of the Roman's vengeance.

A mischievous spirit flew with incredible speed from roof to roof along the line of march, seizing the people, and urging them all alike. They laid hands upon the parapets and tore up the tiling and the sunburnt mud of which the house-tops were for the most part made, and with blind fury began to fling them upon the legionaries halted below.

Judah arose from the parapet, his face very pale.

“ Oh, Tirzah, Tirzah! What will become of us? ”

She had not seen the occurrence below, but was listening to the shouting, and watching the mad activity of the people in view on the houses. Something terrible was going on, she knew; but what it was, or the cause, or that she or any of those dear to her were in danger, she did not know.

“What has happened? What does it all mean?” she asked, in sudden alarm.

“I have killed the Roman governor. The tile fell upon him.”

An unseen hand appeared to sprinkle her face with the dust of ashes—it grew white so instantly. She put her arm around him, and looked wistfully, but without a word, into his eyes. His fears had passed to her, and the sight of them gave him strength.

“I did not do it purposely, Tirzah—it was an accident,” he said, more calmly.

“What will they do?” she asked.

He looked off over the tumult momentarily deepening in the street and on the roofs, and thought of the sullen countenance of Gratus. If he were not dead, where would his vengeance stop? And if he were dead, to what height of fury would not the violence of the people lash the legionaries? To evade an answer, he peered over the parapet again, just as the guard were assisting the Roman to remount his horse.

“He lives, he lives! Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers! Be not afraid, Tirzah. I will explain how it happened, and they will remember our father and his services, and not hurt us.”

He was leading her to the summer-house, when the roof jarred under their feet, and a crash of strong timbers being burst away, followed by a cry of surprise and agony, arose apparently from the courtyard below. He stopped and listened. The cry was repeated; then came a rush of many feet, and voices lifted in rage, mingled with voices in prayer; and then the screams of women in mortal terror. The soldiers had beaten in the north gate, and were in possession of the house. The terrible sense of being hunted smote him. His first impulse was to fly; but where? Nothing but wings would serve him. Tirzah, her eyes wild with fear, caught his arm.

“Oh, Judah, what does it mean?”

The servants were being butchered—and his mother? Was not one of the voices he heard hers? With all the will left him, he said: “Stay here, and wait for me, Tirzah. I will go down and see what is the matter, and come back to you.”

His voice was not as steady as he wished. She clung closer to him.

Clearer, shriller, no longer a fancy, his mother's cry arose. He hesitated no longer.

“Come, then, let us go.”

The terrace or gallery at the foot of the steps was crowded with soldiers. Other soldiers with drawn swords ran in and out of the chambers. At one place a number of women on their knees clung to each other or prayed for mercy. Apart from them, one with torn garments, and long hair streaming over her face, struggled to tear

loose from a man all whose strength was tasked to keep his hold. To her Judah sprang—his steps were long and swift, almost a winged flight—"Mother, mother!" he shouted. She stretched her hands towards him; but when almost touching them he was seized and forced aside. Then he heard some one say, speaking loudly:

"That is he!"

Judah looked, and saw—Messala.

"What, the assassin—that?" said a tall man, in legionary armour of beautiful finish. "Why, he is but a boy."

"Gods!" replied Messala, not forgetting his drawl. "A new philosophy! Must a man be old before he can hate enough to kill? You have him; and that is his mother; yonder his sister. You have the whole family."

For love of them, Judah forgot his quarrel.

"Help them, O my Messala! Remember our childhood, and help them. I—Judah—pray you."

Messala affected not to hear.

"I cannot be of further use to you," he said to the officer. "There is richer entertainment in the street. Down Eros, up Mars!"

With the last words he disappeared. Judah understood him, and, in the bitterness of his soul, prayed to heaven.

"In the hour of Thy vengeance, O Lord," he said, "be mine the hand to put it upon him!"

By great exertion he drew nearer the officer.

"Oh, sir, the woman you hear is my mother. Spare her, spare my sister yonder. God is just, He will give you mercy for mercy."

The man appeared to be moved.

“To the Tower with the women!” he shouted; “but do them no harm. I will demand them of you.” Then to those holding Judah, he said: “Get cords, and bind his hands, and take him to the street. His punishment is reserved.”

The mother was carried away. The little Tirzah, in her home attire, stupefied with fear, went passively with her keepers. Judah gave each of them a last look, and covered his face with his hands, as if to possess himself of the scene fadelessly. He may have shed tears, though no one saw them.

A trumpet sounded in the courtyard, and with the call, the gallery was cleared of the soldiery; many of whom, as they dared not appear in the ranks with plunder in their hands, flinging what they had upon the floor, until it was strewn with articles of great value. When Judah descended, the formation was complete, and the officer waiting to see his last order executed.

The mother, daughter, and entire household were led out of the north gate, the ruins of which choked the passage-way. The cries of the servants, some of whom had been born in the house, were most pitiable. When, finally, the horses and all the other animals of the place were driven past him, Judah began to understand the scope of the procurator's vengeance. The very house was condemned. Nothing living was to be left within its walls. If in Judea there were others desperate enough to think of assassinating a Roman governor, the story of what befell



THE PROCURATOR'S VENGEANCE

the princely family of Hur would be a warning to them, while the ruin of the habitation would keep the story alive.

The officer waited outside while a detail of men temporarily restored the gate.

In the street the fighting had almost ceased. Upon the houses here and there clouds of dust told where the struggle was yet prolonged. The cohort was, for the most part, standing at rest, its splendour, like its ranks, in no wise diminished. Borne past the point of care for himself, Judah had heart for nothing in view but the prisoners, among whom he looked in vain for his mother and Tirzah.

Suddenly, from the earth where she had been lying, a woman arose, and started swiftly back to the gate. Some of the guards reached out to seize her, and a great shout followed their failure. She ran to Judah, and, dropping down, clasped his knees, the coarse black hair powdered with dust veiling her eyes.

“O Amrah, good Amrah,” he said to her, “God help you; I cannot.”

She could not speak.

He bent down and whispered: “Live, Amrah, for Tirzah and my mother. They will come back, and——”

A soldier drew her away; whereupon she sprang up and rushed through the gateway and passage into the vacant courtyard.

“Let her go,” the officer shouted. “We will seal the house, and she will starve.”

The men resumed their work, and, when it was finished there, passed round to the west

side. That gate was also secured, after which the palace of the Hurs was lost to use.

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Next day a detachment of legionaries went to the desolated palace, and, closing the gates permanently, plastered the corners with wax, and at the sides nailed a notice in Latin:

“ THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF
THE EMPEROR ”.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRISONER

TOWARDS the hour of noon upon the following day a decurion¹ with his command of ten horsemen approached Nazareth from the south—that is, from the direction of Jerusalem. The place was then a straggling village, perched on a hill-side, and so small that its one street was little more than a path well beaten by the coming and going of flocks and herds.

A trumpet, sounded when the cavalcade drew near the village, had a magical effect upon the inhabitants. Gates and doors flew open, and men, women and children ran out, eager to know what was happening.

A prisoner whom the horsemen were guarding was the object of curiosity. He was afoot, bare-headed, half-naked, his hands bound behind him. A thong fixed to his wrists was looped over the neck of a horse. The dust went with the party when in movement, wrapping him in yellow fog, sometimes in a dense cloud. He drooped forward, footsore and faint. The villagers could see he was young.

¹ The officer in command of ten soldiers.

At the well the decurion halted, and, with most of the men, dismounted. The prisoner sank down in the dust of the road, stupefied, and asking nothing: apparently he was in the last stage of exhaustion. Seeing, when they came nearer, that he was but a boy, the villagers would have helped him had they dared.

In the midst of their perplexity, and while the pitchers were passing among the soldiers, a man was seen coming down the road from Sepphoris. At sight of him a woman cried out: "Look! Yonder comes the carpenter. Now we will hear something."

The person spoken of was old. Thin white locks fell below the edge of his full turban, and a mass of still whiter beard flowed down the front of his coarse grey gown. He came slowly, for, in addition to his age, he carried some tools—an axe, a saw, and a drawing-knife, all very rude and heavy.

"O Rabbi, good Rabbi Joseph!" cried a woman, running to him. "Here is a prisoner; come ask the soldiers about him, that we may know who he is, and what he has done, and what they are going to do with him."

The rabbi's face did not change; he glanced at the prisoner, however, and presently went to the officer.

"The peace of the Lord be with you!" he said, with gravity.

"And that of the gods with you," the decurion replied.

"Your prisoner is young."

"In years, yes."

“ May I ask what he has done? ”

“ He is an assassin.”

The people repeated the word in astonishment, but Rabbi Joseph asked quietly.

“ Is he a son of Israel? ”

“ He is a Jew,” said the Roman dryly. “ I know nothing of your tribes, but can speak of his family. You may have heard of a prince of Jerusalem named Hur—Ben-Hur, they called him. Well, this is his son. In the streets of Jerusalem, yesterday, he nearly killed the noble Gratus by flinging a tile upon his head from the roof of a palace—his father’s, I believe.”

“ Did he kill him? ” asked the rabbi.

“ No.”

“ He is under sentence? ”

“ Yes—the galleys for life.”

“ The Lord help him! ” said Joseph, for once moved out of his usual calm.

Thereupon a youth who came up with Joseph, but had stood behind him unobserved, laid down an axe he had been carrying, and going to the great stone standing by the well, took from it a pitcher of water. The action was so quiet, that before the guard could interfere he was stooping over the prisoner and offering him drink.

The hand laid kindly upon his shoulder awoke the unfortunate Judah, and, looking up, he saw a face he never forgot—the face of a boy about his own age, shaded by locks of bright chestnut hair; a face lighted by dark-blue eyes, soft, appealing, and full of love and holy purpose. The spirit of the Jew, hardened

though it was by suffering, and so embittered by wrong that its dreams of revenge took in all the world, melted under the stranger's look, and became as a child's. He put his lips to the pitcher, and drank long and deep. Not a word was said to him, nor did he say a word.

When the draught was finished, the hand that had been resting upon the sufferer's shoulder was placed upon his head, and stayed there in the dusty locks time enough to say a blessing; the stranger then returned the pitcher to its place on the stone, and, taking his axe again, went back to Rabbi Joseph. All eyes went with him, the decurion's as well as those of the villagers.

This was the end of the scene at the well. When the men had drunk, and the horses, the march was resumed. But the temper of the decurion was not as it had been; he himself raised the prisoner from the dust, and helped him on a horse behind a soldier. The Nazarenes went to their houses—among them Rabbi Joseph and his apprentice.

And so, for the first time, Judah and the son of Mary met and parted.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROMAN GALLEY

[THREE years later in the noon of a September day, a galley was skimming through the sea off Paestum. A few hours out from Misenum, she was bound for the Ægean there to join the Roman fleet in an attack upon the pirates who had recently swept down upon those waters.] The wind was from the west, filling the sail to the master's content. The watches had been set. On the foredeck stood the altar and before it Quintus Arrius, her commander, had offered solemn prayers to Jove and to Neptune. And now, the better to study his men, he was seated in the great cabin, a very martial figure.

The cabin was the central compartment of the galley, in extent quite sixty-five by thirty feet, and lighted by three broad hatchways. A row of stanchions ran from end to end, supporting the roof, and near the centre the mast was visible, all bristling with axes and spears and javelins. At the after-end there was a platform, reached by several steps. Upon it the chief of the rowers sat; in front of him a sounding-table, upon which, with a mallet, he beat time for the

oarsmen; at his right a water-clock, to measure the reliefs and watches.

Above him, on a higher platform, well guarded by gilded railing, Quintus Arrius had his quarters, overlooking everything, and furnished with a couch, a table, and a chair, cushioned, and with arms and high back. Thus at ease, swaying with the motion of the vessel, the military cloak half-draping his tunic, sword in belt, Arrius kept watchful eye over his command, and was as closely watched by them. He saw critically everything in view, but dwelt longest upon the rowers.

The spectacle was simple enough of itself. Along the sides of the cabin, fixed to the ship's timbers, were what at first appeared to be three rows of benches; a closer view, however, showed them a succession of rising banks, in each of which the second bench was behind and above the first one, and the third above and behind the second.

As to the rowers, those upon the first and second benches sat, while those upon the third, having longer oars to work, were suffered to stand. The oars were loaded with lead in the handles, and, near the point of balance, hung to pliable thongs, making possible the delicate touch called feathering, but, at the same time, increasing the need of skill, since an unexpected wave might at any moment catch a heedless fellow and hurl him from his seat. Each oar-hole was a vent, through which the labourer opposite it had his plenty of sweet air. Lights streamed down upon him from the grating which

formed the floor of the passage between the deck and the bulwark over his head.

In some respects, therefore, the condition of the men might have been much worse. Still, it must not be imagined that there was any pleasantness in their lives. Talking was not allowed. Day after day they filled their places without speech; in hours of labour they could not see each other's faces; their short respites were given to sleep and the snatching of food. They never laughed; no one ever heard one of them sing. Existence with the poor wretches was like a stream under ground sweeping slowly, laboriously on to its outlet, wherever that might chance to be.

These benches which now we are trying to see as they were, illustrated both the policy and the prowess of Rome. Nearly all the nations had sons there, mostly prisoners of war, chosen for their brawn and endurance. In one place a Briton; before him a Libyan; behind him a Crimean. Elsewhere a Scythian, and a Gaul, Roman convicts cast down to consort with Goths and Jews, Ethiopians and barbarians; here an Athenian, there a red-haired savage from Hibernia.

In the labour of the rowers there was not enough art to give occupation to their minds, rude and simple as they were. The reach forward, the pull, the feathering the blade, the dip, were all there was of it; motions most perfect when most automatic. Even the care forced upon them by the sea outside grew in time to be a thing instinctive rather than of thought.

From right to left, hour after hour, the tribune, swaying in his easy-chair, turned with thought of everything rather than the wretchedness of the slaves upon the benches. Their motions, precise, and exactly the same on both sides of the vessel, after a while became monotonous; and then he amused himself singling out individuals. With his stylus he made note of objections, thinking, if all went well, he would find among the pirates of whom he was in search better men for the places.

There was no need of keeping the proper names of the slaves brought to the galleys as to their graves; so, for convenience, they were usually identified by the numbers painted upon the benches to which they were assigned. As the sharp eyes of the great man moved from seat to seat on either hand, they came at last to number sixty, and there they rested.

The bench of number sixty was slightly above the level of the platform, and but a few feet away. The light glinting through the grating over his head gave the rower fairly to the tribune's view—erect, and, like all his fellows, naked, except for a girdle about the loins. He was very young, not more than twenty. He seemed, too, of good height, and his limbs, were singularly perfect. The arms, perhaps, were too long, but the objection was well hidden under a mass of muscle which, in some movements, swelled and knotted like kinking cords. Every rib in the round body was discernible; yet the leanness was the healthful reduction so strained after in the gymnasium,

Very soon Arrius found himself waiting to catch a view of the man's face in full. The head was shapely, and balanced upon a neck broad at the base. The features in profile were of Oriental outline, and of that delicacy of expression which has always been thought a sign of blood and sensitive spirit.

"By the gods," Quintus Arrius said to himself, "the fellow impresses me! He promises well. I will know more of him."

Directly the tribune caught the view he wished—the rower turned and looked at him.

"A Jew! and a boy!"

Under the gaze then fixed steadily upon him, the large eyes of the slave grew larger—the blood surged to his very brows—the blade lingered in his hands. But instantly, with an angry crash, down fell the mallet of the hortator¹. The rower started, withdrew his face from Arrius, and, as if personally chidden, dropped the oar half-feathered. When he glanced again at the tribune, he was vastly more astonished—he was met with a kindly smile.

Meantime the galley entered the Straits of Messina, and, skimming past the city of that name, was after a while turned eastward, leaving the cloud over Ætna in the sky astern.

Often as Arrius returned to his platform in the cabin he returned to study the rower, and he kept saying to himself: "The fellow hath a spirit. A Jew is not a barbarian. I will know more of him."

¹ The timekeeper.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GALLEY SLAVE

THE fourth day out, and the *Astræa*—so the galley was named—speeding through the Ionian Sea. The sky was clear, and the wind blew as if bearing the goodwill of all the gods.

As it was possible to overtake the fleet before reaching the bay east of the island of Cythera, chosen for the meeting, Arrius, somewhat impatient, spent much time on deck. He took note diligently of everything on board, and, as a rule, was well pleased. In the cabin, swinging in the great chair, his thought continually went back to the rower on number sixty.

“Knowest thou the man just come from yon bench?” he at length asked of the hortator.

A relief was going on at the moment.

“From number sixty?” returned the chief.

“Yes.”

The chief looked sharply at the rower then going forward.

“As thou knowest,” he replied, “the ship is but a month from the maker’s hand, and the men are as new to me as the ship.”

“He is a Jew,” Arrius remarked thoughtfully.

“The noble Quintus is shrewd.”

“ He is very young,” Arrius continued.

“ But our best rower,” said the other. “ I have seen his oar bent almost to breaking.”

“ Of what disposition is he? ”

“ He is obedient; further I know not. Once he made request of me.”

“ For what? ”

“ He wished me to change him alternately from the right to the left. He had observed that the men who are confined to one side become misshapen. He also said that some day of storm or battle there might be sudden need to change him, and he might then be un-serviceable.”

“ The idea is new. What else hast thou observed of him? ”

“ He is cleanly above his companions.”

“ In that he is Roman,” said Arrius approvingly. “ Have you nothing of his history? ”

“ Not a word.”

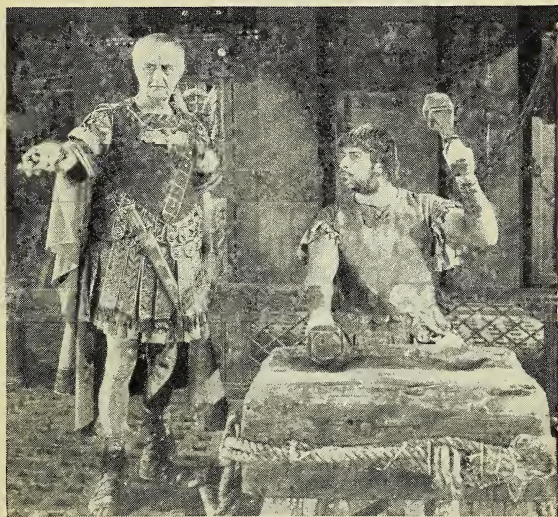
The tribune reflected awhile, and turned to go to his own seat.

“ If I should be on deck when his time is up,” he paused to say, “ send him to me. Let him come alone.”

About two hours later Arrius stood in the stern of the galley; in the mood of one who, seeing himself carried swiftly towards an event of mighty import, has nothing to do but wait. The pilot sat with a hand upon the rope by which the rudder paddles, one on each side of the vessel, were managed. In the shade of the sail some sailors lay asleep, and up on the yard there was a look-out. Lifting his eyes from the sundial

set in the stern for reference in keeping the course, Arrius beheld the rower approaching.

“The chief called thee the noble Arrius, and said it was thy will that I should seek thee here. I am come.”



“SEND HIM TO ME”

Arrius surveyed the figure, tall, sinewy, glistening in the sun, and tinted by the rich red blood within—surveyed it admiringly, and with a thought of the arena; yet the manner was not without effect upon him: there was in the voice a suggestion of life at least partly spent under refining influences; the eyes were clear and open, and more curious than defiant. To the shrewd,

demanding, masterful glance bent upon it, the face gave back nothing to mar its youthful comeliness—nothing of accusation or sullenness or menace, only the signs of a great sorrow long borne. And seeing this, the Roman spoke as an older man to a younger, not as a master to a slave.”

“The hortator tells me thou art his best rower.”

“The hortator is very kind,” the rower answered.

“Hast thou seen much service?”

“About three years.”

“At the oar?”

“I cannot recall a day of rest from them.”

“The labour is hard; few men bear it a year without breaking, and thou—thou art but a boy.”

“The noble Arrius forgets that the spirit hath much to do with endurance. By its help the weak sometimes thrive, when the strong perish.”

“From thy speech, thou art a Jew.”

“My ancestors further back than the first Roman were Hebrews.”

“The stubborn pride of thy race is not lost in thee,” said Arrius, observing a flush upon the rower’s face. “What cause hast thou for pride?”

“That I am a Jew.”

Arrius smiled.

“I have not been to Jerusalem,” he said; “but I have heard of its princes. I knew one of them. He was a merchant, and sailed the

seas. He was fit to have been a king. Of what degree art thou?"

"I must answer thee from the bench of a galley. I am of the degree of slaves. My father was a prince of Jerusalem, and, as a merchant, he sailed the seas. He was known and honoured in the guest-chamber of the great Augustus."

"His name?"

"Ithamar, of the house of Hur."

The tribune raised his hand in astonishment.

"A son of Hur—thou? What brought thee here?"

Judah lowered his head, and his breast laboured hard. When his feelings were sufficiently mastered, he looked the tribune in the face, and answered:

"I was accused of attempting to assassinate Valerius Gratus, the procurator."

"Thou!" cried Arrius, yet more amazed, and retreating a step. "Thou that assassin! All Rome rang with the story. It came to my ship in the river by Londinium."

The two regarded each other silently.

"I thought the family of Hur blotted from the earth," said Arrius, speaking first.

A flood of tender memories carried the young man's pride away; tears shone upon his cheeks.

"Mother—Mother! And my little Tirzah! Where are they? O tribune, noble tribune, if thou knowest anything of them"—he clasped his hands in appeal—"tell me! Tell me if they are living—if living, where are they? and in what condition? Oh, I pray thee, tell

me!" He drew nearer Arrius, so near that his hands touched the cloak where it dropped from the latter's folded arms. "The horrible day is three years gone, three years, O tribune, and every hour a whole lifetime of misery—a lifetime in a bottomless pit with death, and no relief but in labour—and in all that time not a word from anyone, not a whisper."

"Dost thou admit thy guilt?" asked Arrius sternly.

The change that came upon Ben-Hur was wonderful to see, it was so instant and extreme. The voice sharpened; the hands arose tight-clenched; every fibre thrilled; his eyes flamed.

"Thou hast heard of the God of my fathers," he said, "of the infinite Jehovah. By His truth and almightiness, and by the love with which He hath followed Israel from the beginning, I swear I am innocent. O noble Roman! give me a little faith, and, into my darkness, deeper darkening every day, send a light!"

Arrius turned away, and walked the deck.

"Didst thou not have a trial?" he asked, stopping suddenly.

"No!"

The Roman raised his head, surprised.

"No trial—no witnesses! Who passed judgment upon thee?"

"They bound me with cords, and dragged me to a vault in the Tower. I saw no one. No one spoke to me. Next day soldiers took me to the seaside. I have been a galley-slave ever since."

"What couldst thou have proven?"

“ I was a boy, too young to be a conspirator. Gratus was a stranger to me. If I had meant to kill him, that was not the time or the place. He was riding in the midst of a legion, and it was broad day. I could not have escaped. I was of a class most friendly to Rome. My father had been distinguished for his services to the emperor. We had a great estate to lose. Ruin was certain to myself, my mother, my sister. I had no cause for malice, while every consideration—property, family, life, conscience, the Law—to a son of Israel as the breath of his nostrils—would have stayed my hand, though the foul intent had been ever so strong. I was not mad. Death was preferable to shame; and, believe me, I pray, it is so yet.”

Arrius listened intently. If the feeling shown were assumed, the acting was perfect; on the other hand, if it were real, the Jew's innocence might not be doubted; and if he were innocent with what blind fury the power had been exercised!

For once the tribune was at loss, and hesitated. His power was ample. He was monarch of the ship. His feelings all moved him to mercy. His faith was won. Yet, he said to himself, there was no haste—or rather, there was haste to Cythera; the best rower could not then be spared; he would wait; he would learn more; he would at least be sure this was the prince Ben-Hur, and that he was of a right disposition. Ordinarily, slaves were liars.

“ It is enough,” he said aloud. “ Go back to thy place.”

Ben-Hur bowed; looked once more into the master's face, but saw nothing for hope. He turned away slowly, looked back, and said:

"If thou dost think of me again, O tribune, let it not be lost in thy mind that I prayed thee only for word of my people—mother, sister."

He moved on.

Arrius followed him with admiring eyes.

"What a man for the arena!" he thought. "What a runner! Ye gods! what an arm for the sword or the cestus!¹—Stay!" he said aloud.

Ben-Hur stopped, and the tribune went to him.

"If thou wert free, what wouldst thou do!"

"The noble Arrius mocks me!" Judah said, with trembling lips.

"No; by the gods, no!"

"Then I will answer gladly. I would know no rest until my mother and Tirzah were restored to home. I would give every day and hour to their happiness. I would wait upon them; never a slave more faithful. They have lost much, but, by the God of my fathers, I would find them more!"

The answer was unexpected by the Roman. For a moment he lost his purpose.

"I spoke to thy ambition," he said, recovering. "If thy mother and sister were dead, or not to be found, what wouldst thou do?"

A distinct pallor overspread Ben-Hur's face, and he looked over the sea. There was a struggle with some strong feeling; when it was conquered, he turned to the tribune.

¹ A leather gauntlet used by boxers.

"What pursuit would I follow?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Tribune, I will tell thee truly. Only the night before the dreadful day of which I have spoken, I obtained permission to be a soldier. I am of the same mind yet; and, as in all the earth there is but one school of war, thither I would go."

"The palæstra!" exclaimed Arrius.

"No; a Roman camp."

"But thou must first acquaint thyself with the use of arms." Now a master may never safely advise a slave. Arrius saw his mistake, and, in a breath, chilled his voice and manner. "Go now," he said, "and do not build upon what has passed between us. Perhaps I do but play with thee. Or,"—he looked away musingly—"or, if thou dost think of it with any hope, choose between the renown of a gladiator and the service of a soldier. The former may come of the favour of the emperor; there is no reward for thee in the latter. Thou art not a Roman. Go!"

A short while after, Ben-Hur was upon his bench again.

A man's task is always light if his heart is light. Handling the oar did not seem so toilsome to Judah. A hope had come to him, like a singing bird. He could hardly see the visitor or hear its song; that it was there, though, he knew; his feelings told him so. The caution of the tribune—"Perhaps I do but play with thee"—was dismissed often as it recurred to his mind. That he had been called by the great man and

asked his story was the bread upon which he fed his hungry spirit. Surely something good would come of it. The light about his bench was clear and bright with promises, and he prayed:

“O God! I am a true son of the Israel Thou hast so loved! Help me, I pray Thee!”

CHAPTER IX

A GLEAM OF HOPE

IN the Bay of Antemona, east of Cythera the island, the hundred galleys assembled. There the tribune gave one day to inspection. He sailed then to Naxos, the largest of the Cyclades, midway the coasts of Greece and Asia, like a great stone planted in the centre of a highway, from which he could challenge everything that passed.

As the fleet, in order, rowed in towards the mountain shores of the island, a galley was descried coming from the north. Arrius went to meet it. She proved to be a transport just from Byzantium, and from her commander he learned the particulars of which he stood in most need; the pirates, after sacking Hephæstia, on the island of Lemnos, had coursed across to the Thessalian group, and, by last account, disappeared in the gulfs between Eubœa and Hellas.

The tribune was more than pleased with the enemy's movements; he was doubly thankful to Fortune. She had brought swift and sure intelligence, and had lured his foes into the waters where, of all others, destruction was most assured. He knew the havoc one galley could

play in a broad sea like the Mediterranean, and the difficulty of finding and overhauling her; he knew also how those very circumstances would add to the service and glory if, at one blow, he could put a finish to the whole piratical array.

If the reader will take a map of Greece and the Ægean, he will notice the island of Eubœa lying along the classic coast like a rampart against Asia, leaving a channel between it and the continent quite a hundred and twenty miles in length, and scarcely an average of eight in width. The inlet on the north had admitted the fleet of Xerxes, and now it received the bold raiders from the Euxine. The sea-coast towns were rich, and their plunder enticing. All things considered, therefore, Arrius judged that the robbers might be found somewhere below Thermopylæ. Welcoming the chance, he resolved to enclose them north and south, to do which not an hour could be lost; Naxos must be left behind. So he sailed away without stop or tack until, a little before nightfall, Mount Ocha was seen upreared against the sky, and the pilot reported the Eubœan coast.

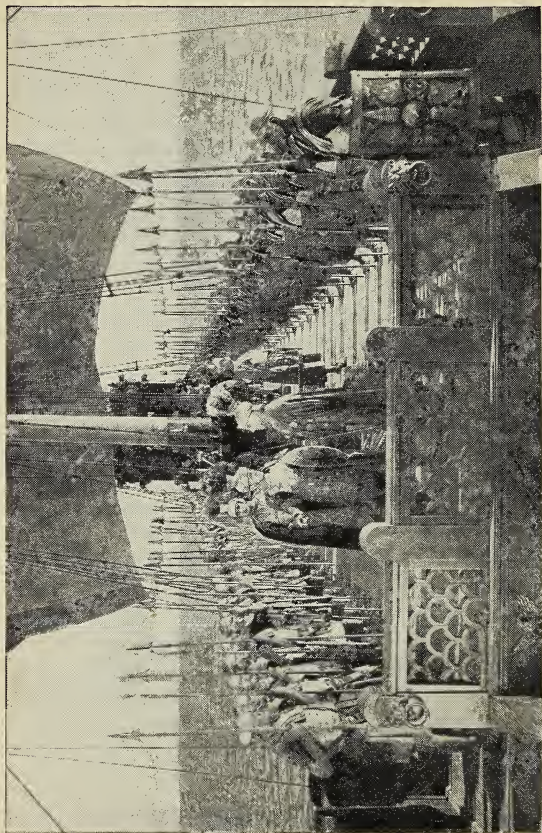
Meantime Ben-Hur kept his bench, relieved every six hours. The rest in the Bay of Antemona had freshened him, so that the oar was not troublesome, and the chief on the platform found no fault. In his long service, by watching the shifting of the meagre sunbeams upon the cabin floor when the ship was under way, he had come to know, generally, the quarter into which she was sailing.

On leaving Cythera, he had thought they were tending towards the old Judean country, and it was with a pang that he had observed the sudden change northward which, as has been noticed, took place near Naxos. The cause, however, he could not even guess at; for it must be remembered that, in common with his fellow-slaves, he knew nothing of the situation, and had no interest in the voyage. His place was at the oar, and he was held there inexorably, whether at anchor or under sail. Once only in three years had he been on deck. The occasion we have seen. He had no idea that, following the vessel he was helping drive, there was a great squadron in beautiful order; no more did he know the object of which it was in pursuit.

When the sun, going down, withdrew his last ray from the cabin, the galley still held northward. Night fell, yet Ben-Hur could discern no change. About that time the smell of incense floated down the gangways from the deck.

“The tribune is at the altar,” he thought. “Can it be we are going into battle?”

In good time the lanterns were lighted and hung by the stairs, and the tribune came down from the deck. At his word the marines put on their armour. At his word again the machines were looked to, and spears, javelins, and arrows, in great sheaves, brought and laid upon the floor, together with jars of inflammable oil, and baskets of cotton balls wound loose like the wicks of candles. And when, finally, Ben-Hur saw the



ON THE DECK OF THE ROMAN GALLEY

tribune mount his platform and put on his armour, and get his helmet and shield out, the meaning of the preparations might not be any longer doubted, and he made ready for the last shame of his service.

To every bench there was a chain with heavy anklets. These the hortator proceeded to lock upon the oarsmen, going from number to number, leaving no choice but to obey, and in event of disaster, no possibility of escape.

In the cabin, then, a silence fell, broken at first only by the sound of the oars turning in the leathern cases. Every man upon the benches felt the shame, Ben-Hur more keenly than his companions. Soon the clanking of the fetters told him of the progress the chief was making in his round. He would come to him in turn; but would not the tribune interpose for him?

The thought may be set down to vanity or selfishness, as the reader pleases; it certainly, at that moment, took hold of Ben-Hur. He believed the Roman would interfere; anyhow, the circumstance would test the man's feelings. If, intent upon the battle, he would but think of him, it would be proof of his opinion formed—proof that he had been tacitly promoted above his comrades in misery—such proof as would justify hope.

Ben-Hur waited anxiously. The interval seemed like an age. At every turn of the oar he looked towards the tribune, who, his simple preparations made, lay down upon the couch, and composed himself to rest; whereupon number

sixty chid himself, and laughed grimly, and resolved not to look that way again.

The hortator approached. Now he was at number one—the rattle of the iron links sounded horribly. At last number sixty! Calm from despair, Ben-Hur held his oar at poise, and gave his foot to the officer. Then the tribune stirred—sat up—beckoned to the chief.

Ben-Hur's heart sang with hope; and when he dropped his oar all the section of the ship on his side seemed aglow. He heard nothing of what was said; enough that the chain hung idly from its staple in the bench, and that the chief, going to his seat, began to beat the sounding-board. The notes of the mallet were never so like music. With his breast against the leaded handle, he pushed with all his might—pushed until the shaft bent as if about to break.

The chief went to the tribune, and, smiling, pointed to number sixty.

“What strength!” he said.

“And what spirit!” the tribune answered. “Ye gods! He is better without the irons. Put them on him no more.”

So saying, he stretched himself upon the couch again.

The ship sailed on hour after hour under the oars, in water scarcely rippled by the wind. And the people not on duty slept, Arrius in his place, the marines on the floor.

Once—twice—Ben-Hur was relieved; but he could not sleep. Three years of night, and through the darkness a sunbeam at last! At sea adrift and lost, and now land! Dead so long,

and, lo! the thrill and stir of resurrection. Sleep was not for such an hour.

Hope deals with the future. Starting from the favour of the tribune, she carried him forward indefinitely. Sorrows healed; home and the fortunes of his house restored; mother and sister in his arms once more—such were the central ideas which made him happier that moment than he had ever been. That he was rushing, as on wings, into horrible battle had, for the time, nothing to do with his thoughts. The things thus in hope were unmixed with doubts—they *were*. Hence his joy so full, so perfect, there was no room in his heart for revenge. Messala, Gratus, Rome, and all the bitter, passionate memories connected with them, were as dead plagues—mists of the earth above which he floated far and safe, listening to singing stars.

The deeper darkness before the dawn was upon the waters, and all things going well with the *Astræa*, when a man, descending from the deck, walked swiftly to the platform where the tribune slept, and awoke him. Arrius arose, put on his helmet, sword and shield, and went to the commander of the marines.

“The pirates are close by. Up and ready!” he said, and passed to the stairs, calm, and confident.

CHAPTER X

THE SEA-FIGHT

I

EVERY soul aboard, even the ship, awoke. Officers went to their quarters. The marines took arms, and were led out, looking in all respects like legionaries. Sheaves of arrows and armfuls of javelins were carried on deck. By the central stairs the oil-tanks and fire-balls were set ready for use. Additional lanterns were lighted. Buckets were filled with water. The rowers in relief assembled under guard in front of the chief. As Providence would have it, Ben-Hur was one of the latter. Overhead he heard the muffled noises of the final preparations—of the sailors furling sail, spreading the nettings, unslinging the machines, and hanging the armour of bull-hide over the sides. Presently quiet settled about the galley again; quiet full of vague dread and expectation, which, interpreted, means *ready*.

At a signal passed down from the deck and communicated to the hortator by a petty officer stationed on the stairs, all at once the oars stopped.

What did it mean?

A sound like the rowing of galleys astern attracted Ben-Hur and the *Astrœa* rocked as if in the midst of countering waves. The idea of a fleet at hand broke upon him—a fleet in manœuvre—forming probably for attack. His blood started with the fancy.

Another signal came down from the deck. The oars dipped, and the galley started imperceptibly. No sound from without, none from within, yet each man in the cabin instinctively held himself ready for a shock; the very ship seemed to catch the sense, and hold its breath, and go crouched tiger-like.

Ben-Hur could form no judgment of distance gone. At last there was a sound of trumpets on deck, full, clear, long-blown. The chief beat the sounding-board until it rang; the rowers reached forward full length, and, deepening the dip of their oars, pulled suddenly with all their united force. The galley, quivering in every timber, answered with a leap. Other trumpets joined in the clamour—all from the rear, none forward—from the latter quarter only a rising sound of voices in tumult heard briefly.

There was a mighty blow; the rowers in front of the chief's platform reeled, some of them fell; the ship bounded back, recovered, and rushed on more irresistibly than before. Shrill and high arose the shrieks of men in terror; over the blare of trumpets, and the grind and crash of the collision, they arose; then under his feet, under the keel, pounding, rumbling, breaking to pieces, drowning, Ben-Hur felt something overridden. The men about him looked at

each other afraid. A shout of triumph from the deck—the beak of the Roman had won! But who were they whom the sea had drunk? Of what tongue, from what land were they?

No pause, no stay! Forward rushed the *Astræa*; and, as it went, some sailors ran down, and plunging the cotton balls into the oil-tanks, tossed them dripping to comrades at the head of the stairs: fire was to be added to other horrors of the combat.

Directly the galley heeled over so far that the oarsmen on the uppermost side with difficulty kept their benches. Again the hearty Roman cheer, and with it despairing shrieks. An enemy vessel, caught by the grappling-hooks of the great crane swinging from the prow, was being lifted into the air that it might be dropped and sunk.

The shouting increased on the right hand and on the left; before, behind, swelled the uproar. Occasionally there was a crash, followed by sudden peals of fright, telling of other ships ridden down, and their crews drowned.

Nor was the fight all on one side. Now and then a Roman in armour was borne down the hatchway, and laid bleeding, sometimes dying, on the floor. Sometimes, also, puffs of smoke, blended with steam, poured into the cabin, turning the dimming light into yellow fog. And Ben-Hur, gasping for breath the while, knew they were passing through the cloud of a ship on fire.

Suddenly the *Astræa* stopped. The oars forward were dashed from the hands of the

rowers, and the rowers from their benches. On deck, then, a furious trampling, and on the sides a grinding of ships afoul of each other. For the first time the beating of the mallet was lost in the uproar. Men sank on the floor in fear, or looked about seeking a hiding-place.

In the midst of the panic a body pitched headlong down the hatchway, falling near Ben-Hur. He beheld the half-naked carcass, a mass of hair blackening the face, and under it a shield of bull-hide and wicker-work—a barbarian from the white-skinned nations of the North whom death had robbed of plunder and revenge.

The *Astræa* had been boarded!

A chill smote the young Jew: Arrius was hard pressed—he might be defending his own life. If he should be slain! God of Abraham, forbid! The hopes and dreams so lately come, were they only hopes and dreams? Mother and sister—house—home—Holy Land—was he not to see them, after all? The tumult thundered above him; he looked around; in the cabin all was confusion—the rowers on the benches still; men running blindly hither and thither; only the chief on his seat unmoved, vainly beating the sounding-board, and waiting the orders of the tribune—in the red gloom illustrating the matchless discipline which had won the world.

The example had a good effect upon Ben-Hur. He controlled himself enough to think. Honour and duty bound the Roman to the platform;

but what had he to do with such motives? The bench was a thing to run from; while, if he were to die a slave, who would be the better of the sacrifice? With him living was duty, if not honour. His life belonged to his people.

He started—stopped. Alas! a Roman judgment held him in doom. Escape would be profitless. In the wide, wide earth there was no place in which he would be safe from the imperial demand; upon the land none, nor upon the sea. Not until he received freedom according to the forms of law, could he abide in Judea and devote himself to searching for his lost ones.

Dear God! How he had waited and watched and prayed for such a release! And how it had been delayed! But at last he had seen it in the promise of the tribune. What else the great man's meaning? And if now he should be slain! The dead come not back to redeem the pledges of the living. It should not be—Arrius should not die. At least, better perish with him than survive a galley-slave.

II

Once more Ben-Hur looked around. Upon the roof of the cabin the battle yet beat; against the sides the hostile vessels yet crushed and ground. On the benches, the slaves struggled to tear loose from their chains, and, finding their efforts vain, howled like madmen; the guards

had gone upstairs; discipline was out, panic in. No, the chief kept his chair, unchanged, calm as ever—except for his mallet, weaponless. Vainly with his beating he filled the lulls in the din. Ben-Hur gave him a last look, then broke away—not in flight, but to seek the tribune.

A very short space lay between him and the stairs of the hatchway aft. He took it with a leap, and was half-way up the steps—up far enough to catch a glimpse of the sky blood-red with fire, when suddenly his foothold was knocked away, and he pitched backward. The floor, when he reached it, seemed to be lifting itself and breaking to pieces; then, in a twinkling, the whole after-part of the hull broke asunder, and, as if it had all the time been lying in wait, the sea, hissing and foaming, leaped in, and all became darkness and surging water to Ben-Hur.

The intruding waters tossed him like a log forward into the cabin, but fathoms below, the hollow mass shot him forth, and he rose to the surface amid a mass of wreckage. In the act of rising, he clutched something, and held to it. With a great gasp he filled his lungs afresh, and, tossing the water from his hair and eyes, climbed higher upon the plank he held, and looked about him.

Smoke lay upon the sea like a fog, through which here and there shone the red glow of ships on fire. The battle was yet on; nor could he say who was victor. Now and then ships passed, shooting shadows athwart lights and out of the smoke clouds farther on he caught the crash of other ships colliding.

The danger, however, was close at hand. When the *Astræa* went down, her deck held her own crew, and the crews of the two galleys which had attacked her. Many of them came to the surface together, and on the same plank or support of whatever kind continued the combat, begun possibly fathoms below. Writhing and twisting in deadly embrace, sometimes striking with sword or javelin they kept the sea around them in an uproar, at one place inky-black, at another aflame with fiery reflections. With their struggles Ben-Hur had nothing to do; they were all his enemies: not one of them but would kill him for the plank upon which he floated. He made haste to get away.

About that time he heard oars in quickest movement, and beheld a galley coming down upon him. The tall prow seemed doubly tall, and the red light playing upon its gilt and carving gave it an appearance of snaky life. Under its foot the water churned to flying foam. He struck out, pushing the plank which was very broad and unmanageable. Seconds were precious—half a second might save or lose him.

And then, suddenly, up from the sea, within arm's reach, a helmet shot like a gleam of gold. Next came two hands with fingers extended—large hands were they, and strong—their hold once fixed might not be loosed. Ben-Hur swerved from them in fear. Up rose the helmet and the head it covered—then two arms, which began to beat the water wildly—the head turned back, and gave the face to the light. The mouth gaping wide; the eyes open, but sightless,

and the bloodless pallor of a drowning man—never anything more ghastly! Yet Ben-Hur gave a cry of joy at the sight, and as the face was going under again, he caught the sufferer by the chain which passed from the helmet beneath the chin, and drew him to the plank.

The man was Arrius, the tribune.

For a while the water foamed and eddied violently about Ben-Hur, taxing all his strength to hold to the support and at the same time keep the Roman's head above the surface. The galley had passed, leaving the two barely outside the stroke of its oars. Right through the floating men, over heads helmeted as well as heads bare, she drove, in her wake nothing but the sea sparkling with fire. A muffled crash, succeeded by a great outcry, made the rescuer look again from his charge. A certain savage pleasure touched his heart—the *Astrœa* was avenged.

After that the battle moved on. Resistance turned to flight. But who were the victors? Ben-Hur knew well how much his freedom and the life of the tribune depended upon that event. He pushed the plank under the latter until it floated him, after which all his care was to keep him there.

The dawn came slowly. He watched its growing hopefully, yet sometimes afraid. Would it bring the Romans or the pirates? If the pirates, his charge was lost.

At last morning broke in full, the air without a breath. Off to the left he saw the land, too far to think of attempting to make it. Here and there men were adrift like himself. In spots

the sea was blackened by charred and sometimes smoking fragments. A galley up a long way was lying to with a torn sail hanging from the tilted yard, and the oars all idle. Still farther away he could discern moving specks, which he thought might be ships in flight or pursuit, or they might be white birds a-wing.

An hour passed thus. His anxiety increased. If relief came not speedily, Arrius would die. Sometimes he seemed already dead, he lay so still. He took the helmet off, and then, with greater difficulty, the breastplate; the heart he found fluttering. He took hope at the sign, and held on. There was nothing to do but wait, and, after the manner of his people, pray.

CHAPTER XI

FREE AND ADOPTED

THE throes of recovery from drowning are more painful than the drowning. These Arrius passed through, and at length, to Ben-Hur's delight, reached the point of speech.

Gradually, from confused questions as to where he was, and by whom and how he had been saved, he reverted to the battle. The doubt of the victory roused him fully to his senses, and after a while he became talkative.

“Our rescue depends upon the result of the fight. I see what thou hast done for me. Thou hast saved my life at the risk of thy own; and whatever cometh, thou hast my thanks. More than that, if fortune doth but serve me kindly, and we get well out of this peril, I will do thee such favour as becometh a Roman who hath power and opportunity to prove his gratitude. Yet”—he hesitated—“I would exact of thee a promise to do me, in a certain event, the greatest favour one man can do another—and of that let me have thy pledge now.”

“If the thing be not forbidden I will do it,” Ben-Hur replied.

Arrius rested again.

“Art thou, indeed, a son of Hur, the Jew?” he next asked.

“It is as I have said.”

“I knew thy father——”

Judah drew himself nearer, for the tribune’s voice was weak—he drew nearer, and listened eagerly—at last he thought to hear of home.

“I knew him, and loved him,” Arrius continued.

There was another pause, during which something diverted the speaker’s thought.

“It cannot be,” he proceeded, “that thou, a son of his, hast not heard of Cato and Brutus. They were very great men, and never as great as in death. In their dying, they left this law—A Roman may not survive his good fortune. Then pledge me. By the gods——”

“Nay, good tribune, I am a Jew.”

“By thy God, then, pledge me to do what I tell thee now, and as I tell thee; I am waiting, let me have thy promise.”

“Noble Arrius, I am warned by thy manner to expect something of gravest concern. Tell me thy wish first.”

“Wilt thou promise then?”

“That were to give the pledge, and——” he broke off suddenly “blessed be the God of my fathers! yonder cometh a ship!”

“In what direction?”

“From the north.”

“Canst thou tell her nationality by outward signs?”

“No. My service hath been at the oars.”

“Hath she a flag?”

“I cannot see one.”

Arrius remained quiet some time, apparently in deep thought.

“Does the ship hold this way yet?” he at length asked.

“Still this way.”

“Look for the flag now.”

“She hath none.”

“Nor any other sign?”

“She hath a sail set, and is of three banks, and cometh swiftly—that is all I can say of her.”

“A Roman in triumph would have out many flags. She must be an enemy. Hear, now,” said Arrius, becoming grave again, “hear, while yet I may speak. If the galley be a pirate, thy life is safe; they may not give thee freedom they may put thee to the oar again; but they will not kill thee. On the other hand, I——”

The tribune faltered.

“By the gods!” he continued resolutely. “I am too old to submit to dishonour. In Rome, let them tell how Quintus Arrius, as became a Roman tribune, went down with his ship in the midst of the foe. This is what I would have thee do. If the galley prove a pirate, push me from the plank and drown me. Dost thou hear? Swear, thou wilt do it.”

“I will not swear,” said Ben-Hur firmly; “neither will I do the deed. The Law, which is to me most binding, would make me answerable for thy life. In the three years of my servitude, O tribune, thou wert the first

to look upon me kindly. No, no! There was another." The voice dropped, the eyes became wet, and he saw plainly as if it were then before him the face of the boy who helped him to a drink by the old well at Nazareth. "At least," he proceeded, "thou wert the first to ask me who I was; and if, when I reached out and caught thee, blind and sinking the last time, I had thought of the many ways in which thou couldst be useful to me in my wretchedness, still the act was not all selfish; this I pray you to believe. I would rather die with thee than be thy slayer. My mind is firmly set as thine; though thou wert to offer me all Rome, O tribune, and it belonged to thee to make the gift good, I would not kill thee. Thy Cato and Brutus were as little children compared to the Hebrew whose law a Jew must obey."

"But my request. Hast——"

"Thy command would be of more weight, and that would not move me. I have said."

Both became silent, waiting. Ben-Hur looked often at the coming ship. Arrius rested with closed eyes, indifferent.

"Art thou sure she is an enemy?" Ben-Hur asked.

"I think so," was the reply. "Dost thou see her flag?"

"Is there no other sign by which she may be known, if Roman?"

"If Roman, she hath a helmet over the mast's top."

"Then be of cheer. I see the helmet."

Still Arrius was not assured.

“The men in the small boat are taking in the people afloat. Pirates are not humane.”

“They may need rowers,” Arrius replied, thinking possibly of times when he had made rescues for the purpose.

“The ship moves off,” Ben-Hur said presently. “Over on our right there is a galley which I take to be deserted. The new-comer heads towards it. Now she is alongside. Now she is sending men aboard.”

Then Arrius opened his eyes, and threw off his calm.

“Thank thou thy God,” he said to Ben-Hur, after a look at the galleys, “thank thou thy God, as I do my many gods. A pirate would sink, not save, yon ship. By the act and the helmet on the mast I know a Roman. The victory is mine. Fortune hath not deserted me. We are saved. Wave thy hand—call to them—bring them quickly. I shall be duumvir¹, and thou! I knew thy father, and loved him. He was a prince indeed. He taught me a Jew was not a barbarian. I will take thee with me. I will make thee my son. Give thy God thanks, and call the sailors. Haste! The pursuit must be kept. Not a robber shall escape. Hasten them.”

Judah raised himself upon the plank, and waved his hand, and called with all his might; at last he drew the attention of the sailors in the small boat, and they were speedily taken up.

Arrius was received on the galley with all the honours due a hero so the favourite of Fortune.

¹ An officer of highest rank.

Upon a couch on the deck he heard the particulars of the conclusion of the fight. When the survivors afloat upon the water were all saved and the prize secured, he spread his flag of command anew, and hurried northward to rejoin the fleet and perfect the victory. In due time the fifty vessels coming down the channel closed in upon the fugitive pirates, and crushed them utterly; not one escaped. To swell the tribune's glory, twenty galleys of the enemy were captured.

Upon his return from the cruise, Arrius had warm welcome on the mole at Misenum. The young man attending him very early attracted the attention of his friends there; and in answer to their questions as to who he was the tribune gladly told the story of his rescue and introduced the stranger, saying nothing, however of the latter's previous history. At the end of the narrative he called Ben-Hur to him, and said, with a hand resting affectionately upon his shoulder:

“Good friends, this is my son and heir, who, as he is to take my property—if it be the will of the gods that I leave any—shall be known to you by my name. I pray you all to love him as you love me.”

And in such manner the brave Roman kept his faith with Ben-Hur.

CHAPTER XII

AT ANTIOCH

FIVE years later, upon a day in July, a transport galley was nearing Antioch, then Queen of the East, and next to Rome the strongest city in the world.

The heat was great, yet all on board who could avail themselves of the privilege were on deck—Ben-Hur among others. For an hour and more he had occupied a seat in the shade of the sail, and in that time several fellow-passengers of his own nationality had tried to engage him in conversation, but without avail.

It chanced that as the galley entered the receiving bay of the Orontes, two other vessels passed into the river at the same time; and as they did so, threw out small flags of brightest yellow. There was much talk as to the meaning of the signals, and one of the passengers asked a Hebrew standing by, if he happened to know what they were.

“Yes,” he replied; “they are merely marks of ownership. They belong to a merchant of Antioch. That he is vastly rich has brought him into notice, and the talk about him is not always kind. There used to be in Jerusalem a prince of very ancient family named Hur.”

Judah's heart beat quicker.

"The prince was a merchant, with a genius for business. He set on foot many enterprises, some reaching far East, others West. In the great cities he had branch houses. The one in Antioch was in charge of a man said by some to have been a family servant called Simonides, Greek in name, yet an Israelite. The master was drowned at sea. His business, however, went on, and was scarcely less prosperous.

"But after a while misfortune overtook the family. The prince's only son, nearly grown, tried to kill the procurator Gratus in one of the streets of Jerusalem. He failed by a narrow chance, and has not since been heard of. In fact, the Roman's rage took in the whole house—not one of the name was left alive. Their palace was sealed up, and is now a rookery for pigeons; the estate was confiscated. The procurator cured his hurt with a golden salve."

The passengers laughed.

"You mean he kept the property," said one of them.

"They say so," the Hebrew replied; "Simonides, who had been the prince's agent here in Antioch, opened trade on his own account, and in a very short time became the master merchant of the city. They say the procurator took only the prince's property ready at hand—his horses, cattle, houses, land, vessels, goods. The money could not be found: some think that it furnished old Simonides his start. The procurator is of that opinion—or he has

been—for twice in five years he has caught the merchant, and put him to torture.”

Judah gripped the rope he was holding with crushing force.

“Now, however, he is past persecution. He has a licence to trade signed by Tiberius himself. These ships are his. It is a custom among his sailors to salute each other on meeting by throwing out yellow flags, sight of which is as much as to say: ‘We have had a fortunate voyage’.”

The story ended there.

When the transport was fairly in the channel of the river, Judah spoke to the Hebrew.

“What was the name of the merchant’s master?”

“Ben-Hur, Prince of Jerusalem.”

“Your story has made me curious to see him. You called him Simonides?”

“Yes. He is a Jew with a Greek name.”

“Where is he to be found?”

The Hebrew gave a sharp look before he answered.

“I may save you disappointment. He is not a money-lender.”

“Nor am I a money-borrower,” said Ben-Hur, smiling at the other’s shrewdness.

The man raised his head and considered an instant.

“If you would find him in the day, follow the river to yon bridge, under which he quarters in a building that looks like a buttress of the wall. Before the door there is an immense landing, always covered with cargoes. The fleet that

lies moored there is his. You cannot fail to find him."

"I give you thanks."

"The peace of our fathers go with you."

"And with you."

With that they separated.

Two street porters, loaded with his baggage, received Ben-Hur's orders upon the wharf.

"Take me to the inn nearest the bridge on the road to Seleucia."

And in good time he was deposited in a public house within a stone's throw of the bridge under which old Simonides had his quarters. He lay upon the house-top through the night. In his inner mind lived the thought: "Now—now I will hear of home—and Mother—and the dear little Tirzah. If they are on earth, I will find them."

CHAPTER XIII

DISAPPOINTED

I

NEXT day early, Ben-Hur sought the house of Simonides. Through an embattled gateway he passed to a stretch of wharves; thence up the river midst a busy press, to the Seleucian Bridge, and there, directly under the bridge, was the merchant's house, a mass of grey stone, unhewn, looking as the voyager had described it, like a buttress of the wall against which it leaned. Below the bridge lay a fleet of galleys, some loading, others unloading. A yellow flag blew out from each masthead. From fleet and wharf, and from ship to ship, slaves, stripped to the waist, passed busily to and fro.

Now, at last, Ben-Hur thought to hear of his people—this, certainly, if Simonides had indeed been his father's slave. But would the man acknowledge the relation? That would be to give up his riches and the sovereignty of trade so royally witnessed on the wharf and river.

Yet if the Hebrew's story were true, Simonides belonged to him, with all he had. For the wealth, be it said in justice, he cared nothing.

When he started to the door determined in mind, it was with a promise to himself—"Let him tell me of mother and Tirzah, and I will give him his freedom without account."

The interior of the house was that of a vast depot where, in ordered spaces, and under careful arrangement, goods of every kind were heaped. Though the light was dim and the air stifling, men moved about briskly; and in places he saw workmen with saws and hammers making packages for shipments. Down a path between the piles he walked slowly, until at length a man approached and spoke to him.

"What would you have?"

"I would see Simonides, the merchant."

By a number of paths left in the stowage, they came to a flight of steps; ascending which he found himself on the roof of the depot, and in front of a structure which cannot be better described than as a lesser stone house built upon another, a plain, square block, unbroken except by a doorway in front. At the end of a darkened passage within they stopped before a curtain half-parted. The man called out:

"A stranger to see the master."

A clear voice replied: "In God's name, let him enter."

The room in which Ben-Hur found himself had panelled walls; each panel having a pigeon-hole like a modern office desk, crowded with labelled folios. Above a cornice of gilded balls, the ceiling rose in pavilion style until it broke into a shallow dome set with hundreds of panes of violet mica. The floor was carpeted

with grey rugs so thick that an invading foot fell half-buried and soundless.

In the midlight of the room were two persons—a man resting in a chair high-backed, broad-armed, and lined with soft cushions; and at his left, leaning against the back of the chair, a girl well forward into womanhood. At sight of them Ben-Hur felt the blood redden his forehead; bowing, as much to recover himself as in respect, he lost the lifting of the hands, and the shiver and shrink with which the sitter caught sight of him—an emotion as swift to go as it had been to come. When he raised his eyes the two were in the same position, except that the girl's hand had fallen and was resting lightly upon the elder's shoulder; both of them were regarding him fixedly.

“If you are Simonides, the merchant, and a Jew”—Ben-Hur stopped an instant—“then the peace of the God of our father Abraham upon you and—yours.”

“I am the Simonides of whom you speak, by birthright a Jew,” the man made answer, in a voice singularly clear, “and I return you your salutation, with prayer to know who calls upon me.”

Ben-Hur looked as he listened, and where the figure of the man should have been in healthful roundness, there was only a formless heap sunk in the depths of the cushions, and covered by a quilted robe of dark silk. Over the heap shone a head, with white hair which dropped in thin locks over the white brows, deepening the blackness of the eyes shining through them like sullen lights.

In other words, the head and face were those of a man who might move the world more readily than the world could move him; a man to yield his life, but never a purpose or a point. To him Ben-Hur stretched his hands, open and palm up, as he would offer peace at the same time he asked it.

“I am Judah, son of Ithamar, late head of the House of Hur, and a prince of Jerusalem.”

The merchant's right hand closed tightly; otherwise there was not the slightest expression of feeling of any kind.

“Coming up the river yesterday, I heard you knew my father.”

“I knew the Prince Hur. We were partners in many trading ventures in lands beyond the sea and the desert. But sit, I pray you—and, Esther, some wine for the young man.”

As Esther brought him a silver cup filled from a vase upon a table, their eyes met; whereat he noticed that she was small, not nearly to his shoulder in height; but very graceful, and fair and sweet of face, with eyes black and very, soft.

“Nay, fair Esther,” he said, “thy father, when he has heard my further speech will not think worse of me if yet I am slow to take his wine; nor less I hope not to lose grace in thy sight. Simonides!” he said firmly, “my father, at his death, had a trusted servant of thy name, and it has been told me that thou art the man!”

There was a sudden start of the wrenched limbs under the robe, and the thin hand clenched. Nevertheless the man answered steadily, “If

he who told thee that was a friend who knew my history, he must have persuaded thee that I could not be else than a man distrustful of my kind. Do thou show me proofs of who thou art. Is thy witness in writing? Or cometh it in person?"

The demand was plain, and the right of it not to be denied. Ben-Hur blushed, clasped his hands, stammered, and turned away at loss. Simonides pressed him.

"The proofs, the proofs, I say! Set them before me—lay them in my hands!"

Yet Ben-Hur had no answer. Now to him as never before came the awful fact that the three years in the galley had carried away all the proofs of his identity; mother and sister gone, he did not live in the knowledge of any human being. Had Quintus Arrius been yet living, what could he have said more than where he found him, and that he believed him to be the son of Hur?

"Master Simonides," he said at length. "I can only tell my story.

"Speak," said Simonides, now indeed master of the situation—"speak, and I will listen the more willingly that I have not denied you to be the very person you claim yourself."

II

Ben-Hur went on then, and told his life hurriedly, but as we are familiar with it down to his landing at Misenum, in company with

Arrius, returned victorious from the Ægean, at that point we will take up the words.

“ My benefactor was loved and trusted by the emperor, who heaped him with honourable rewards. The good man adopted me as his son by formal rights of law; and I strove to make him just return. Oh, ask you why I accepted the kindness of the Roman? I loved him; next place, I thought I could, with his help, array influences which would enable me one day to unseal the mystery close-locking the fate of my mother and sister.

“ I devoted myself to arms. In the palæstræ and circuses of the city I toiled, and in the camps no less; and in all of them I have a name, but not that of my fathers. The crowns I won—and on the walls of the villa by Misenum there are many of them—all came to me as the son of Arrius, the duumvir. By that name only am I known among Romans.

“ In steadfast pursuit of my secret aim, I left Rome for Antioch, intending to accompany the Consul Maxentius in his campaign against the Parthians. But yesterday, as our ship entered the Orontes, two other ships sailed in with us flying yellow flags. A fellow-passenger explained that the vessels belonged to Simonides, the master-merchant of Antioch; Simonides, a Jew, once the servant of the Prince Hur; nor did he conceal the cruelties of Gratus, or the purpose of their infliction.”

At this allusion Simonides bowed his head, and, as if to help him conceal his feelings and her own deep sympathy, the daughter hid her

face on his neck. Directly he raised his eyes, and said, in a clear voice: "I am listening."

"O good Simonides!" Ben-Hur then said, advancing a step, his whole soul seeking expression, "I see thou art not convinced, and that yet I stand in the shadow of thy distrust. And not less clearly I see the difficulties of my position. All my Roman connection I can prove but I cannot prove I am my father's son. They who could serve me in that—alas! they are dead or lost."

He covered his face with his hands; whereupon Esther arose, and, taking the rejected cup to him, said: "The wine is of the country we all so love. Drink, I pray thee!"

He saw there were tears in her eyes, and he drank, saying: "Daughter of Simonides, thy heart is full of goodness. Be thou blessed of our God! I thank thee."

Then he addressed himself to the merchant again:

"As I have no proof that I am my father's son, I will withdraw that I demanded of thee, O Simonides, and go hence to trouble you no more; only let me say I did not seek thy return to servitude nor account of thy fortune; keep it in welcome. I have no need of any part thereof. When the good Quintus sailed on the voyage which was his last, he left me his heir, princely rich. If, therefore, thou dost think of me again, be it with remembrance of this question, which, as I do swear by the prophets and Jehovah, thy God and mine, was the chief purpose of my coming here: What dost thou

know—what canst thou tell me—of my mother, and Tirzah my sister? Oh! what canst thou tell me of them?”

The tears ran down Esther's cheeks; but the man was wilful: in a clear voice, he replied:

“I have said I knew the Prince Ben-Hur. I remember hearing of the misfortune which overtook his family. I remember the bitterness with which I heard it. He who wrought such misery to the widow of my friend is the same who, in the same spirit, hath since wrought upon me. I will go further, and say to you I have made diligent search for the family, but—I have nothing to tell you of them. They are lost.”

Ben-Hur uttered a great groan.

“Then—then it is another hope broken!” he said, struggling with his feelings. “I pray you pardon my intrusion; and if I have given you annoyance, forgive it because of my sorrow. I have nothing now to live for but vengeance. Farewell.”

At the curtain he turned, and said simply: “I thank you both.”

And so he departed.

Scarcely was he gone, when Simonides seemed to wake as from sleep: his countenance flushed; the sullen light of his eyes changed to brightness and he said cheerily:

“Esther, summon Malluch, quick.”

She clapped her hands.

One of the panels in the wall swung back, exposing a doorway which gave admittance to a

man who passed round to the merchant's front, and saluted him with a half-salaam.

"Malluch, here—nearer—to the chair," the master said imperiously. "Hearken! A young man is now descending to the store-room—tall, comely, and in the garb of Israel; follow him, his shadow not more faithful; and every night send me report of where he is, what he does, and the company he keeps. Understand you? Go quickly! And, mark you, Malluch, be as a friend. If he bespeak you, tell him what you will, except that you are in my service; of that, not a word. Haste—make haste!"

The man saluted as before, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIV

EXPLORING

I

WHEN Ben-Hur left the great warehouse, it was with a sense of utter loneliness. He gave little heed to the road he followed, being deep in thought, and at length found himself before a forest of cypress-trees, each a column tall and straight as a mast. Passing on into the shadow of the trees, he heard a trumpet gaily blown, and an instant after saw lying upon the grass close by a countryman whom he had run upon in the road once before. The man arose and came to him.

“I give you peace again,” he said pleasantly. “I am for the stadium, if that is your way.”

“The stadium!”

“Yes. The trumpet you heard was a call for the competitors.”

“Good friend,” said Ben-Hur frankly, “if you will let me be your follower, I will be glad. I am the son of Arrius, the duumvir, and thou?”

“I am Malluch, a merchant of Antioch.”

“Well, good Malluch, the trumpet and the sound of wheels, and running horses excite me. I have some skill in the exercises. In the

palæstræ of Rome I am not unknown. Let us to the course."

Malluch lingered to say quickly: "The duumvir was a Roman, yet I see his son in the garments of a Jew."

"The noble Arrius was my father by adoption," Ben-Hur answered.

"Ah! I see, and beg pardon."

Passing through the belt of forest, they came to a field with a track laid out upon it, in shape and extent exactly like those of the stadia. The track was of soft earth, rolled and sprinkled, and on both sides marked out by ropes, stretched loosely upon upright javelins. For the use of spectators, there were several stands shaded by awnings, and provided with seats in rising rows, and in one of these stands the two new-comers found places.

Ben-Hur counted the chariots as they went by—nine in all, each drawn by four horses.

"I commend the fellows," he said, with goodwill. "Here in the East, I thought they aspired to nothing better than the two; but they are ambitious, and play with royal fours."

Eight of the fours passed the stand, some walking, others on the trot, and all skilfully handled; but when the ninth one came on the gallop, Ben-Hur burst into exclamation.

"I have been in the stables of the Emperor, Malluch, but by our father Abraham of blessed memory! I never saw the like of these."

The last four was then sweeping past. All at once they fell into confusion. Some one on the stand uttered a sharp cry. Ben-Hur turned, and

saw an old man half-risen from an upper seat, his hands clenched and raised, his eyes fiercely bright, his long white beard fairly quivering.

"Who is he?" asked Ben-Hur.

"A mighty man from the Desert, somewhere beyond Moab, and owner of camels in herds, and horses descended, they say, from the racers of the first Pharaoh—Sheik Ilderim by name and title."

The driver meanwhile exerted himself to quiet the four, but without avail. Each ineffectual effort excited the sheik the more.

"Abaddon seize him!" yelled the patriarch shrilly. "Run! fly! do you hear, my children!" The question was to his attendants, apparently of the tribe. "Do you hear! They are Desert-born, like yourselves. Catch them—quick! Accursed Roman!" and the sheik shook his fist at the driver. "Did he not swear he could drive them! Nay, hands off me—off, I say! They should run swift as eagles, and with the temper of hand-bred lambs, he swore. Cursed be he! See them, the priceless! Let him touch one of them with a lash, and——" the rest of the sentence was lost in a furious grinding of his teeth. "To their heads, some of you, and speak them—a word, one is enough, from the tent-song your mothers sang you. Oh, fool, fool that I was to put trust in a Roman!"

Ben-Hur sympathized with him. For more than mere pride of property—more than anxiety for the result of the race—in his view it was possible for the patriarch to love such animals with a tenderness akin to the most sensitive passion. They had grown up under his eyes,

objects of his special care in the day, his visions of pride in the night, with his family at home in the black tent out on the shadeless bosom of the desert, as his children beloved.

That they might win him a triumph over the haughty and hated Roman, the old man had brought his loves to the city, never doubting they would win, if only he could find a trusty driver to take them in hand; not merely one with skill, but of a spirit which their spirits would acknowledge.

Before the patriarch was done with his fury, another chariot appeared upon the track; and, unlike the others, driver, vehicle, and racers were precisely as they would be presented in the Circus the day of final trial. The others had been received in silence; but as the last comer moved towards the stand his progress was signalized by clapping of hands and cheers, the effect of which was to centre attention upon him exclusively. His yokesteeds were black, the trace-mates snow-white. According to Roman taste, their tails had been clipped, and their short manes were divided into knots tied with flaring red and yellow ribbons.

The chariot would of itself have justified the shouting. The wheels were very marvels of construction. Stout bands of burnished bronze strengthened the hubs, otherwise very light; the spokes were sections of ivory tusks, set in with the natural curve outward; bronze tires held the rims, which were of shining ebony. The axle, in keeping with the wheels, was tipped with heads of snarling tigers done in brass, and the bed was woven of willow wands gilded with gold.

The coming of the beautiful horses and resplendent chariot drew Ben-Hur to look at the driver with increased interest.

Who was he?

When Ben-Hur asked himself the question first, he could not see the man's face, or even his full figure; yet the air and manner were familiar, and pricked him keenly with a reminder of a period long gone.

Who could it be?

Nearer now, and the horses coming at a trot. Ben-Hur arose and forced a passage down nearly to the railing in front of the lower seat of the stand. His face was earnest, his manner eager.

And directly the whole person of the driver was in view. A companion rode with him, but Ben-Hur had eyes only for the driver, standing erect in the chariot, with the reins passed several times round his body—a handsome figure, scantily covered by a tunic of light-red cloth; in the right hand a whip; in the other, the arm raised and lightly extended, the four reins. He held himself with an easy grace. The cheers and clapping of hands were received with cold indifference. Ben-Hur stood transfixed—his instinct and memory had served him faithfully—*the driver was Messala!*

II

As Ben-Hur descended the steps of the stand, an Arab arose upon the last one at the foot, and cried out:

“Men of the East and West—hearken! The good Sheik Ilderim giveth greeting. With four horses, sons of the favourites of Solomon the Wise, he hath come up against the best. Needs he most a mighty man to drive them. Whoso will take them to his satisfaction, to him he promiseth enrichment for ever. Here—there—in the city and in the Circuses, and wherever the strong most do gather, tell ye this his offer. So saith my master, Sheik Ilderim the Generous.”

The proclamation awakened a great buzz among the people under the awning. By night it would be repeated and discussed in all the sporting circles of Antioch. Ben-Hur, hearing it, stopped and looked hesitatingly from the herald to the sheik, so that Malluch thought he was about to accept the offer.

Instead he turned, and gripping him suddenly by the arm, said in a voice that quivered with feeling:

“Good Malluch, may a man forget his mother?”

The question was abrupt and without direction, and therefore of the kind which leaves the person addressed in a state of confusion. Malluch looked into Ben-Hur’s face for a hint of meaning, but saw, instead, two bright-red spots, one on each cheek, and in his eyes traces of what might have been repressed tears; then he answered mechanically: “No!” adding, with fervour: “never”; and a moment after, when he began to recover himself: “If he is an Israelite, never!”

The red spots on Ben-Hur’s face deepened.

“The words, Malluch, prove you a genuine Jew. I believe I can trust you.”

He let go the arm he was holding, and caught the folds of the gown covering his breast, and pressed them close, as if to smother a pain, or a feeling there as sharp as a pain.

“My father,” he said, “bore a good name, and was not without honour in Jerusalem, where he dwelt. My mother was good and beautiful. I had a little sister, and we were so happy that I, at least, have never seen harm in the saying of the old rabbi: ‘God could not be everywhere, and therefore, he made mothers’.

“One day an accident happened to a Roman in authority as he was riding past our house at the head of a cohort; the legionaries burst the gate and rushed in and seized us. I have not seen my mother or sister since. I cannot say they are dead or living. I do not know what became of them. But, Malluch, the man in the chariot yonder”—he flung out his hand, pointing to Messala—“was present at the separation; he gave us over to the captors; he heard my mother’s prayer for her children, and he laughed when they dragged her away. To-day I knew him afar—and, Malluch——”

He caught the listener’s arm again.

“And, Malluch, he knows and takes with him now the secret I would give my life for; he could tell if she lives, and where she is, and her condition; if she—no, *they*—much sorrow has made the two as one—if they are dead, he could tell where they died, and of what, and where their bones await my finding.”

“And will he not?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“I am a Jew, and he is a Roman.”

“I wonder you did not strike him,” said Malluch, yielding to a touch of passion.

“That would have been to put him past serving me for ever. I would have had to kill him, and Death, you know, keeps secrets better even than a guilty Roman. Nay, I would not take his life, good Malluch; yet I may punish him. Ay, and I will!”

Once again he caught Malluch by the arm with a grip that made the other wince.

“By the prophets of our old Israel! I will take to the reins again. Fear not, my friend. The winners in the Circus Maximus¹ have held their crowns these three years at my will. Ask them—ask the best of them, and they will tell you so. In the last great games the emperor himself offered me his patronage if I would take his horses in hand and run them against the entries of the world. I will drive the wondrous four of Sheik Ilderim the Generous, I will——”

“Win the sestertii²!” said Malluch.

“No,” answered Ben-Hur as quickly. “I will do what better becomes a man born to the heritage of Jacob—I will humble mine enemy in a most public place.”

¹ The Great Circus at Rome.

² A sestertius was a silver coin (plural, sestertii).

CHAPTER XV

A ROMAN REVEL

THAT evening in a palace by the river Orontes, a party of young Romans were making merry.

The hum of voices is loud and sometimes there is an explosion of laughter, sometimes a burst of rage or joy; but over all prevails a sharp prolonged rattle. The company is at the favourite games—draughts and dice—singly or together, and the rattle is merely that of the ivory cubes, loudly shaken, and the moving of the pieces on the checkered boards.

Day was stealing through the skylights, when a group of young men entered the room, and unnoticed at first, proceeded to the central table. The signs were that they had come from a revel just ended. Around their leader's brow was a chaplet which marked him master of the feast, if not the giver. His beauty was of the most manly Roman style; he carried his head high; the blood flushed his lips and cheeks brightly; his eyes glittered. In going to the table, he made room for himself and his followers with little ceremony and no apologies; and when at length he stopped, and looked over it and at

the players, they all turned to him, with a shout like a cheer.

“Messala! Messala!” they cried.

“A health to thee, Drusus, my friend,” he said to the player next at his right; “a health—and thy tablets a moment.”

He raised the waxen boards, glanced at the list of wagers, and tossed them down.

“Denarii, only denarii—coin of cartmen and butchers!” he said, with a scornful laugh. “By the gods, to what is Rome coming, when a Cæsar sits o’ nights waiting a turn of fortune to bring him but a beggarly denarius!”

Drusus reddened to his brows, but the bystanders broke in upon his reply by surging closer around the table, and shouting: “The Messala! the Messala!”

Messala’s voice dropped into an easy, familiar tone, but without losing the ascendancy he had gained.

“In the great chest up in the citadel I have five talents coin current in the markets, and here are the receipts for them.” From his tunic he drew a roll of paper, and, flinging it on the table, continued, amidst breathless silence, every eye fixed on his, every ear listening: “The sum lies there the measure of what I dare. Who of you dares so much? You are silent. Is it too great? I will strike off one talent. What! still silent? Come, then, throw me once for these three talents—only three; for two; for one—one at least—one for the honour of the river by which you were born—Rome East against Rome West—Orontes the barbarous

against Tiber the sacred!" He rattled the dice overhead while waiting. "The Orontes against the Tiber!" he repeated, with an increase of scorn.

Not a man moved; then he flung the box upon the table, and, laughing, took up the receipts.

"Ha, ha, ha! By the Olympian Jove, I know now ye have fortunes to make or to mend; therefore are ye come to Antioch. Come, my Drusus, come!" He took up the box again and rattled the dice merrily. "Here for what sum thou wilt, let us measure fortunes."

The manner was frank, cordial, winsome. Drusus melted in a moment.

"Ye gods! yes!" he said, laughing. "I will throw with thee, Messala—for a denarius."

A very boyish person was looking over the table watching the scene. Suddenly Messala turned to him. "I have need of a clerk. Wilt thou serve me?"

The young man drew his tablets ready to keep the score: the manner was irresistible.

"Hold, Messala, hold!" cried Drusus. "I know not if it be unlucky to stay the poised dice with a question; but one occurs to me, and I must ask it."

"Nay, my Drusus; to thy question—I will make the throw and hold it against mischance. Thus——"

He turned the box upon the table and held it firmly over the dice.

And Drusus asked: "Did you ever see one Quintus Arrius?"

"The duumvir?"

“No—his son.”

“I knew not he had a son.”

“Well, it is nothing,” Drusus added indifferently; “only, my Messala, he is almost the image of thee.”

The remark had the effect of a signal; twenty voices took it up.

“True, true! His eyes—his face,” they cried.

“What!” answered one, disgusted. “Messala is a Roman; Arrius is a Jew.”

There was promise of a dispute; seeing which, Messala interposed. “The wine is not come, my Drusus. As to Arrius, I will accept thy opinion of him, so thou tell me more about him.”

“Well, be he Jew or Roman—and, by the gods, I say it not in disrespect of thy feelings, my Messala!—this Arrius is handsome and brave and shrewd. The emperor offered him favour and patronage, which he refused. He came up through mystery, and keepeth distance as if he felt himself better or knew himself worse than the rest of us. In the palæstræ he was unmatched; he played with the blue-eyed giants from the Rhine, and the hornless bulls of Sarmatia as they were willow wisps. The duumvir left him vastly rich. He has a passion for arms, and thinks of nothing but war. Maxentius admitted him into his family, and he was to have taken ship with us, but we lost him at Ravenna. Nevertheless, he arrived safely. We heard of him this morning. Instead of coming to the palace or going to the citadel, he dropped his baggage at the inn, and hath disappeared again.”

Thereupon Messala turned to Drusus.

“Tell us more of him who is both Jew and Roman. What garments doth he affect, my Drusus?”

“Those of the Jews.”

“And, Drusus, help thou thy friend again. Doubtless this Arrius hath tricks of language; otherwise he could not so confound himself, to-day a Jew, to-morrow a Roman; but of the rich tongue of Greece—discourseth he in that as well?”

“With such purity, Messala, that he might be in truth a Greek.”

“Thy pardon, Drusus—and pardon of all—for speaking in riddles thus,” Messala said, in his winsome way. “By all the gods, I would not strain thy courtesy to the point of breaking, but now help thou me. Thou didst speak, I think, of mystery in connection with the coming of the son of Arrius. Tell me of that.”

“’Tis nothing, Messala, nothing,” Drusus replied; “a child’s story. When Arrius, the father, sailed in pursuit of the pirates he was without wife or family; he returned with a boy—him of whom we speak—and next day adopted him.”

“Adopted him?” Messala repeated. “By the gods, Drusus, thou dost indeed interest me! Where did the duumvir find the boy? And who was he?”

“Who shall answer thee that, Messala? who but the young Arrius himself? In the fight the duumvir—then but a tribune—lost his galley. A returning vessel found him and one other

—all of the crew who survived—afloat upon the same plank. I give you now the story of the rescuers, which hath this excellence at least—it hath never been contradicted. They say, the duumvir's companion on the plank was a Jew——”

“A Jew!” echoed Messala.

“And a slave.”

“How, Drusus? A slave?”

“When the two were lifted to the deck, the duumvir was in his tribune's armour, and the other was a rower.”

Messala arose from leaning against the table.

“A galley sl——.”—He checked the debasing word, and looked around, for once in his life at loss. But in a moment he had recovered himself. He stooped and uncovered the dice, saying with a laugh: “See, my Drusus, the denarius is mine!”

CHAPTER XVI

IN AN ARAB HOME

[**M**EANWHILE Ben-Hur, his plan once formed, had lost no time. The sun had not set when he presented himself before the door of Sheik Ilderim's tent in the Orchard of Palms, and offered himself as driver of the wondrous four.

The old man looked at him awhile in silence and then said gravely,] "That thou art my guest, and art about to taste my salt, ought not to forbid a question: Who art thou?"

"Sheik Ilderim," said Ben-Hur, calmly enduring his gaze, "I know thou dost but seek assurance to justify the trust I have come to ask. So it please thee, then, first, I am not a Roman, as the name given thee as mine implieth. In the next place, I am an Israelite of the tribe of Judah."

The sheik raised his brows a little.

"Nor that merely. Sheik, I am a Jew with a grievance against Rome, compared with which thine is not more than a child's trouble."

The old man combed his beard with nervous haste, and let fall his brows, until even the twinkle of the eyes went out.

"Still further: I swear to thee, Sheik Ilderim

—I swear by the covenant the Lord made with my fathers—so thou but give me the revenge I seek, the money and the glory of the race shall be thine.”

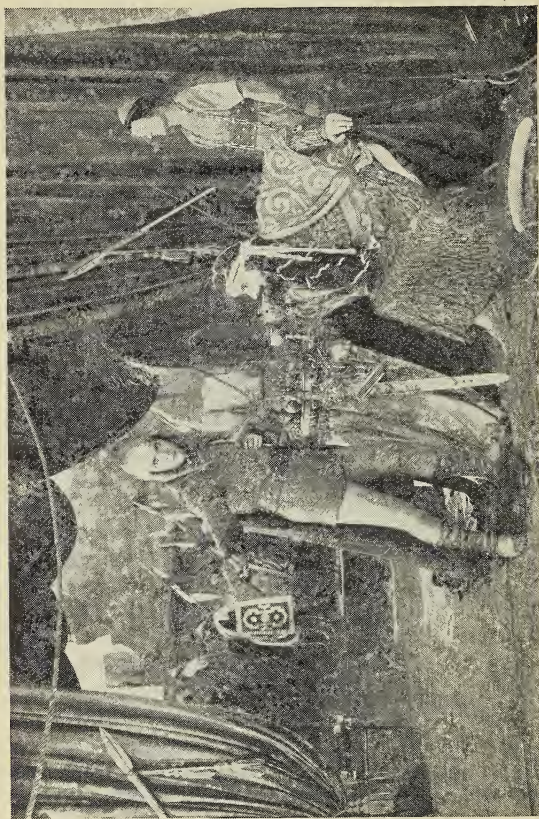
Ilderim's brows relaxed; his head arose; his face began to beam, and it was almost possible to see the satisfaction taking hold of him.

“Enough!” he said. “That thou art not a Roman—that as a Jew thou hast a grievance against Rome, and revenge to compass, I believe; and on that score enough. But as to thy skill. What experience hast thou in racing with chariots? And the horses—canst thou make them creatures of thy will?—to know thee? to come at call? to go, if thou sayest it, to the last extreme of breath and strength? and then, out of the depths of thy life thrill them to one exertion the mightiest of all? The gift, my son, is not to every one. Ho, there! Let my steeds come!”

The division curtain of the tent swung aside, giving to view a group of horses, who lingered a moment where they were as if to make certain of the invitation.

“Come!” Ilderim said to them. “Why stand ye there? What have I that is not yours? Come, I say!”

A head of exquisite turn—with large eyes, soft as a deer's, and half-hidden by the dense forelock, and small ears, sharp-pointed and sloped well forward—approached then quite to Ben-Hur's breast, the nostrils open, and the upper lip in motion. “Who are you?” it asked, plainly as ever man spoke. Ben-Hur



IN THE TENT OF SHEIK ILDERIM

recognized one of the four racers he had seen on the course, and gave his open hand to the beautiful brute.

Ilderim clapped his hands.

“Bring me the records of the tribe,” he said to the servant who answered, and presently six men appeared with chests of cedar bound by bands of brass, and hinged and bolted with brass.

“Nay,” said Ilderim, “I meant not all of them; only the records of the horses—that one. Open it, and take back the others.”

The chest was opened, disclosing a mass of ivory tablets strung on rings of silver wire; and as the tablets were scarcely thicker than wafers, each ring held several hundreds of them.

“I know,” said Ilderim, taking some of the rings in his hand—“I know with what care and zeal, my son, the scribes of the Temple in the Holy City keep the names of the newly born, that every son of Israel may trace his descent to its beginning, though it be earlier than the patriarchs. My fathers—may their memories be green for ever!—did not think it sinful to borrow the idea, and apply it to their dumb servants. See these tablets! Know thou, then, each tablet records the name of a foal of the pure blood born to my fathers through the hundreds of years passed. Take them, and note their age, that thou mayest the more readily believe.

“In the chest there, I can tell thee now, I have the perfect history—showing of what stock all these are sprung—this one, and that now

begging for thy notice and caress; and as they come to us here, their fathers came to my fathers, under a tent-roof of this like mine to eat their measure of barley from the open hand, and be talked to as children, and, as children, kiss the thanks they have not speech to express. I could tell thee marvels done by their ancestors. For the present enough that they were never overtaken in retreat; nor, by the sword of Solomon, did they ever fail in pursuit! That, mark you, on the sands and under saddle; but now—I do not know—I am afraid, for they are under yoke for the first time, and the conditions of success are so many. They have the pride and the speed and the endurance. If I find them a master they will win. Son of Israel! so thou art the man, I swear it shall be a happy day that brought thee hither. Of thyself now speak.”

“I know now,” said Ben-Hur, “why it is that in the love of an Arab his horse is next to his children; and I know also why the Arab horses are the best in the world; but, good sheik, I would not have you judge me by words alone; for, as you know, all promises of men sometimes fail. Give me the trial first on some plain hereabout, and put the four in my hand to-morrow.”

Ilderim’s face beamed again, and he would have spoken.

“A moment, good sheik, a moment!” said Ben-Hur. “Let me say further. From the masters in Rome I learned many lessons, little thinking they would serve me in a time like this. I tell thee these thy sons of the Desert, though

they have separately the speed of eagles and the endurance of lions, will fail if they are not trained to run together under the yoke. For bethink thee, sheik, in every four there is one the slowest and one the swiftest; and while the race is always to the slowest, the trouble is always with the swiftest. It was so to-day; the driver could not reduce the best to keep pace with the poorest. My trial may have no better result; but if so, I will tell thee of it; that I swear. Wherefore, in the same spirit I can say, can I get them to run together, moved by my will, the four as one, thou shalt have the sestertii and the crown, and I my revenge. What sayest thou?"

Ilderim listened, combing his beard the while. At the end he said, with a laugh: "I think better of thee, son of Israel. We have a saying in the Desert: 'If you will cook the meal with words, I will promise an ocean of butter.' Thou shalt have the horses in the morning."

CHAPTER XVII

GRATUS WARNED

THREE hours after dawn two couriers entered Messala's room, and from his own hand received each a despatch, sealed and in duplicate, and consisting chiefly of a letter to Valerius Gratus, the procurator, still dwelling in Cæsarea. The importance attached to the speedy and certain delivery of the paper may be guessed. One courier was to go overland, the other by sea; both were to make the utmost haste.

“O my Midas!” Messala wrote. “I have to relate to thee an astonishing event, but allow me first to revive thy memory. Remember, a good many years ago, a family of a prince of Jerusalem, vastly rich—by name Ben-Hur. If thy memory fail thee, there is, if I mistake not, a wound on thy head which may remind thee.

“Next, to arouse thy interest. In punishment of the attempt upon thy life the family were summarily disposed of, and their property seized. And inasmuch, O my Midas! as the action had the approval of our Cæsar, there should be no shame in referring to the sums which were realized to us respectively from that source, for which it is not possible I can ever cease to be grateful to thee, certainly not while I continue, as at present, in the enjoyment of the part which fell to me.

“Thou wilt remember what thou didst with the mother and sister of the criminal; yet, if now I yield to a desire

to learn whether they be living or dead, I know, from knowing the amiability of thy nature, O my Gratus, that thou wilt pardon me as one scarcely less amiable than thyself.

“The actual criminal was sent to the galleys a slave for life; and I saw and read the receipt for his body delivered in course to the tribune commanding a galley.

“Referring to the limit of life at the oar, the outlaw thus justly disposed of should be dead at least five years ago, and I have lived quite five years in calm and innocent enjoyment of the fortune for which I am in a degree indebted to him.

“Now I am at the very point of interest.

“Last night, while acting as master of the feast for a party just from Rome I heard a singular story. Maxentius, the consul, as you know, comes to-day to conduct a campaign against the Parthians. Of the ambitious who are to accompany him there is one, a son of the late duumvir Quintus Arrius. I had occasion to enquire about him particularly. When Arrius set out in pursuit of the pirates, whose defeat gained him his final honours, he had no family; when he returned from the expedition, he brought back with him an heir. The son and heir of whom I speak is he whom thou didst send to the galleys—the very Ben-Hur who should have died at his oar five years ago—returned now with fortune and rank, and possibly as a Roman citizen, to—— Well, thou art too firmly seated to be alarmed, but I, O my Midas! I am in danger—no need to tell thee of what. Who should know, if thou dost not?

“When Arrius joined battle with the pirates, his vessel was sunk, and but two of all her crew escaped drowning—Arrius himself and this one, his heir.

“The officers who took them from the plank on which they were floating say the companion of the fortunate tribune was a young man who, when lifted to the deck, was in the dress of a galley-slave.

“This should be convincing, to say least; but, I tell thee, O my Midas! that yesterday, by good chance, I met the mysterious son of Arrius face to face; and I declare now that, though I did not then recognize him, he is the very Ben-Hur who was for years my playmate; the very Ben-

Hur who, if he be a man, though of the commonest grade, must this very moment of my writing be thinking of vengeance—for so would I were I he—vengeance not to be satisfied short of life; vengeance for country, mother, sister, self, and—I say it last—though thou mayst think it should be first—for fortune lost.

“It were vulgar to ask thee now what shall be done. Rather let me say that thy part it is to give me sound direction.

“The sun is now fairly risen. An hour hence two messengers will depart from my door, each with a sealed copy hereof; one of them will go by land, the other by sea, so important do I regard it that thou shouldst be early and particularly informed of the appearance of our enemy in this part of our Roman world.

“I will await thy answer here.

“Ben-Hur’s going and coming will of course be regulated by his master, the consul, who, though he exert himself without rest day and night, cannot get away under a month.

“I saw the Jew yesterday in the Grove of Daphne; and if he be not there now, he is certainly in the neighbourhood, making it easy for me to keep him in eye. Indeed, wert thou to ask me where he is now, I should say, with the most positive assurance, he is to be found at the old Orchard of Palms, under the tent of the traitor Sheik Ilderim, who cannot long escape our strong hand. Be not surprised if Maxentius, as his first measure, places the Arab on ship for forwarding to Rome.

“I am so particular about the whereabouts of the Jew because it will be important to thee, O illustrious! when thou comest to consider what is to be done.

“Have thou then no hesitancy in trusting the business to thy most loving friend, who would be thy aptest scholar as well.

“MESSALA.”

CHAPTER XVIII

PREPARATION

I

ABOUT the time the couriers departed from Messala's door with the despatches (it being yet the early morning hour), Ben-Hur entered Ilderim's tent. He had taken a plunge into the lake, and breakfasted, and appeared now in an under-tunic, sleeveless, and with skirt scarcely reaching to the knee.

The sheik saluted him from the divan.

"I give thee peace, son of Arrius," he said, with admiration, for, in truth, he had never seen a more perfect example of glowing, powerful, confident manhood. "I give thee peace and goodwill. The horses are ready, I am ready. And thou?"

"The peace thou givest me, good sheik, I give thee in return. I thank thee for so much goodwill. I am ready."

Ilderim clapped his hands.

"I will have the horses brought. Be seated."

"Are they yoked?"

"No."

"Then suffer me to serve myself," said Ben-Hur. "It is needful that I make the

acquaintance of thy steeds. I must know them by name, O sheik, that I may speak to them singly; nor less must I know their temper, for they are like men: if bold, the better of scolding; if timid, the better of praise and flattery. Let the servants bring me the harness."

"And the chariot?" asked the sheik.

"I will let the chariot alone to-day. In its place let them bring me a fifth horse, if thou hast it; he should be barebacked, and fleet as the others."

Ilderim's wonder was aroused, and he summoned a servant immediately.

"Bid them bring the harness for the four," he said; "the harness for the four, and the bridle for Sirius."

Ilderim then arose.

"Sirius and I, O son of Arrius, have been comrades for twenty years—in tent, in battle, in all stages of the desert we have been comrades. I will show him to you."

Going to the division curtain, he held it while Ben-Hur passed under. The horses came to him in a body. One with a small head, shining eyes, neck like the curve of a bended bow, and mighty chest, curtained thickly by a profusion of mane soft and wavy as a damsel's locks, whinnied low and gladly at sight of him.

"Good horse," said the sheik, patting the dark-brown cheek. "Good horse, good morning." Turning then to Ben-Hur, he added: "This is Sirius, father of the four here. Mira, the mother, awaits our return, being too precious to be risked in a region where there is a

stronger hand than mine. And much I doubt"—he laughed as he spoke—"much I doubt, O son of Arrius, if the tribe could endure her absence. She is their glory; they worship her; did she gallop over them, they would laugh! Ten thousand horsemen, sons of the desert, will ask to-day: 'Have you heard of Mira?' And to the answer: 'She is well,' they will say: 'God is good! blessed be God!'"

"Mira—Sirius—names of stars, are they not, O sheik?" asked Ben-Hur, going to each of the four, and to Sirius, offering his hand.

"And why not?" replied Ilderim. "My fathers all had their Miras, as I have mine; and these children are stars no less. There, see thou, is Rigel, and there Antares; that one is Atair, and he whom thou goest to now is Aldebaran, the youngest of the brood, but none the worse of that—no, not he! Against the wind he will carry thee till it roar in thy ears; and he will go where thou sayest, son of Arrius—ay, by the glory of Solomon, he will take thee to the lion's jaws, if thou darest so much."

The harness was brought. With his own hands Ben-Hur equipped the horses; with his own hands he led them out of the tent, and there attached the reins.

"Bring me Sirius," he said. An Arab could not have better sprung to seat on the courser's back. "And now the reins." They were given him, and carefully separated. "Good sheik," he said, "I am ready. Let a guide go before me to the field, and send some of thy men with water."

There was no trouble at starting. The horses were not afraid. Already there seemed an understanding between them and the new driver, who had performed his part calmly, and with the confidence which always begets confidence. The order of going was precisely that of driving, except that Ben-Hur sat upon Sirius instead of standing in the chariot. Ilderim's spirit arose. He combed his beard, and smiled with satisfaction as he muttered, "He is not a Roman, no, by the splendour of God!"

The field proved well fitted for the training, which Ben-Hur began immediately by driving the four at first slowly, and in perpendicular lines, and then in wide circles. Advancing a step in the course, he put them next into a trot; again progressing, he pushed into a gallop; at length he contracted the circles, and yet later drove here and there, right, left, forward, and without a break. Two hours were thus occupied, and then, slowing the gait to a walk, he drove up to Ilderim.

"The work is done, nothing now but practice," he said. "I give you joy, Sheik Ilderim, that you have such servants as these. See, the gloss of their red coats is without spot; they breathe lightly as when I began. I give thee great joy, and it will go hard if"—he turned his flashing eyes upon the old man's face—"if we have not the victory and our revenge. With leave, O sheik, I will return thy steeds to the tent, and bring them out again this afternoon."

Ilderim walked to him as he sat on Sirius, and said: "I give them to you, son of Arrius, to do

with as you will until after the games. You have done with them in two hours what the Roman—may jackals gnaw his bones fleshless!—could not in as many weeks. We will win—by the splendour of God, we will win!” He walked away and back again to Ben-Hur swiftly, and caught his shoulder with a strong grasp.

“If I were as thou, son of Arrius—as young, as strong, as practised in arms; if I had a motive hissing me to revenge—a motive, like thine, great enough to make hate holy—Away with disguise on thy part and on mine! Son of Hur, son of Hur, I say——”

II

At that name all the currents of Ben-Hur’s blood stopped; surprised, bewildered, he gazed into the Arab’s eyes, now close to his, and fiercely bright.

“You call me son of Hur—my father’s name. I did not think myself known to a person on earth. How came you by the knowledge?”

Ilderim hesitated; but rallying, he answered: “I know you, yet I am not free to tell you more.”

“Someone holds you in restraint?”

The sheik closed his mouth, and walked away; but, observing Ben-Hur’s disappointment, he came back, and said: “Let us say no more about the matter now. I will go to the town; when I return, I may talk to you fully.”

He put an arm over his shoulder, and kissed him, saying passionately: "If thy God favour thee not, son of Hur, it is because He is dead. Take thou this from me—sworn to if it be thy wish: thou shalt have my hands, and their fullness—men, horses, camels, and the desert for preparation. I swear it! For the present, enough. Thou shalt see or hear from me before night."

Turning abruptly off, the sheik was speedily on the road to the city.

When he had gone, Ben-Hur wandered far through the Orchard, pausing now where the date-gatherers were busy, yet not too busy to offer him of their fruit and talk with him. Later, the mid-day meal being disposed of, he had the chariot rolled out into the sunlight for inspection. Next he brought the horses, and, hitching them to the chariot, drove to the field of exercise, where, hour after hour, he practised them in movement under the yoke. When he came away in the evening, his confidence in the result was absolute; and as to the four, they were his full partners in the glorious game.

"Let Messala look to it, let him look to it! Ha, Antares—Aldebaran! Shall he not, O honest Rigel? and thou, Atair, king among coursers, shall he not beware of us? Ha, ha! good hearts!"

So he passed from horse to horse, speaking, not as a master, but the senior of as many brethren.

After nightfall, he sat by the door of the tent waiting for Ilderim, not yet returned from the

city. At last there was a sound of horse's feet coming rapidly, and Malluch rode up.

"Son of Arrius," he said cheerily, after salutation. "I salute you for Sheik Ilderim, who requests you to mount and go to the city. He is waiting for you."

Ben-Hur asked no questions, but went in where the horses were feeding. Aldebaran came to him, as if offering his service. He played with him lovingly, but passed on, and chose another, not of the four—they were sacred to the race. Very shortly the two were on the road, going swiftly and in silence.

Down to Simonides' landing they rode, and in front of the great warehouse, under the bridge, Malluch drew rein.

"We are come," he said. "Dismount."

A watchman took the horses, and almost before he realized it Ben-Hur stood once more at the door of the house upon the greater one, listening to the response from within—"In God's name, enter."

CHAPTER XIX

ACKNOWLEDGED

MALLUCH stopped at the door; Ben-Hur entered alone.

The room was the same in which he had formerly interviewed Simonides, and it had been in nowise changed, except now, close by the arm-chair, a polished brazen rod, set on a broad wooden pedestal, arose higher than a tall man, holding lamps of silver, half a dozen or more in number, and all burning.

Within, a few steps, Ben-Hur stopped.

Three persons were present, looking at him—Simonides, Ilderim, and Esther.

He glanced hurriedly from one to another, as if to find answer to the question half-formed in his mind, What business can these have with me? He became calm, with every sense on the alert, for the question was succeeded by another, Are they friends or enemies?

At length his eyes rested upon Esther.

The men returned his look kindly; in her face there was something more than kindness.

“Son of Hur——”

The guest turned to the speaker.

“Son of Hur,” said Simonides, repeating the address slowly, and distinctly, as if to impress

all its meaning upon him, "take thou the peace of the Lord God of our fathers—take it from me." He paused, and then added: "From me and mine."

The speaker sat in his chair; there were the royal head, the bloodless face, the masterful air, under the influence of which visitors forgot the broken limbs and distorted body of the man. The full black eyes gazed out under the white brows steadily, but not sternly. A moment thus, then he crossed his hands upon his breast. The action, taken with the salutation, could not be misunderstood, and was not.

"Simonides," Ben-Hur answered, much moved, "the holy peace you tender is accepted. As son to father, I return it to you. Only let there be perfect understanding between us."

Thus delicately he sought to put aside the submission of the merchant, and, in place of the relation of master and servant, substitute one higher and holier.

Simonides let fall his hands, and, turning to Esther, said: "A seat for the master, daughter."

She hastened, and brought a stool, but Ben-Hur advanced, gently took the stool from her, and, going to the chair, placed it at the merchant's feet.

"I will sit here," he said.

Simonides bowed his acknowledgment.

"Esther, child, bring me the paper," he said, with a breath of relief.

She went to a panel in the wall, opened it and took out a roll of papyri.¹

¹ Paper made from the bark of a plant.

“Thou saidst well, son of Hur,” Simonides began, while unrolling the sheets. “Let us understand each other. I have here a statement covering everything necessary to the understanding required. I could see but two points involved—the property first, and then our relation. The statement is clear as to both. Will it please thee to hear it now?”

From separate sheets he then read footings, which, fractions omitted, were as follows:

CR.					
By ships	..	..	..	..	60 talents.
„ goods in store	..	..	..	..	110 „
„ cargoes in transit	..	..	..	..	75 „
„ camels, horses, etc.	..	..	..	..	20 „
„ warehouses	..	..	..	..	10 „
„ bills due	..	..	..	..	54 „
„ money on hand and subject to draft					224 „
					<hr/>
Total	..	..	..	..	553 talents.

“To these now, to the five hundred and fifty-three talents gained, add the original capital I had from thy father, and thou hast SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THREE TALENTS!—and all thine—making thee, O son of Hur, the richest subject in the world.”

He rolled the papyri and offered them to Ben-Hur. The pride in his manner was not offensive; it might have been from a sense of duty well done; it might have been for Ben-Hur without reference to himself.

“And there is nothing,” he added, dropping his voice, but not his eyes—“there is nothing now thou mayest not do.”

Taking the roll, Ben-Hur arose, struggling with emotion.

“All this is to me as a light from heaven,” he said, with a husky voice. “I give first thanks to the Lord, who has not deserted me, and my next to thee, O Simonides. Thy faithfulness outweighs the cruelty of others, and redeems our human nature. ‘There is nothing I cannot do;’ be it so. Shall any man in this my hour of such mighty privilege be more generous than I?”

He stretched his hand with the roll to Simonides.

“The things these papers take into account—all of them: ships, houses, goods, camels, horses, money; the least as well as the greatest—give I back to thee, O Simonides, making them all thine, and sealing them to thee and thine for ever.”

Esther smiled through her tears; Ilderim pulled his beard with rapid motion, his eyes glistening like beads of jet. Simonides alone was calm.

“Sealing them to thee and thine for ever,” Ben-Hur continued, with better control of himself, “with one exception, and upon one condition.”

The breath of the listeners waited upon his words.

“The hundred and twenty talents which were my father’s thou shalt return to me. And thou shalt join me in search of my mother and sister, holding all thine subject to the expense of discovery, even as I will hold mine.”

Simonides was much affected. Stretching out his hand, he said: "I see thy spirit, son of Hur, and I am grateful to the Lord that He hath sent thee to me such as thou art. If I served well thy father in life, and his memory afterwards, be not afraid of my failing thee; yet must I say the exception cannot stand."

Showing, then, the reserved sheet, he continued:

"Thou hast not all the account. Take this and read—read aloud."

Ben-Hur took the supplement, and read it.

"Statement of the servants of Hur, rendered by Simonides, steward of the estate.

"1. Amrah, Egyptian, keeping the palace in Jerusalem.

"2. Simonides, the steward, in Antioch.

"3. Esther, daughter of Simonides."

Now, in all his thoughts of Simonides, not once had it entered Ben-Hur's mind that, by the law, a daughter followed the parent's condition. He shrank from the revelation so suddenly brought him, and looked at Esther blushing; and, blushing, she dropped her eyes before him. Then he said, while the papyrus rolled itself together.

"O Simonides—and thou, fair Esther—fear not. Sheik Ilderim here shall be witness that in the same moment ye were declared my servants, that moment I declared ye free."

"Son of Hur," said Simonides, "verily thou dost make servitude light. I was wrong; there are some things thou canst not do; thou canst not make us free in law. I am thy servant

for ever, because I went to the door with thy father one day, and in my ear the awl-marks yet abide."¹

"Did my father that?"

"Judge him not," cried Simonides quickly. "He accepted me a servant of that class because I prayed him to do so. It was the price I paid for Rachel, the mother of my child here; for Rachel, who would not be my wife unless I became what she was."

"Was she a servant for ever?"

"Even so."

Ben-Hur walked the floor in distress.

"I was rich before," he said, stopping suddenly. "I was rich with the gifts of the generous Arrius; now comes this greater fortune, and the mind which made it. Is there not a purpose of God in it all? Counsel me, O Simonides! Help me to see the right and do it. Help me to be worthy my name."

Simonides' face actually glowed.

"O son of my dead master! I will do better than help; I will serve thee with all my might of mind and heart. Only make me formally what I have assumed to be."

"Name it," said Ben-Hur eagerly.

"As steward the care of the property will be mine."

"Count thyself steward now; or wilt thou have it in writing?"

"Thy word simply is enough; it was so with the father, and I will not more from the son."

¹ According to the Jewish Law a servant who allowed his master to pierce his ear with an awl became his servant for ever.

And now, if the understanding be perfect——”
Simonides paused.

“It is with me,” said Ben-Hur.

“And thou, daughter of Rachel, speak!”
said Simonides, lifting her arm from his shoulder.

Esther, left thus alone, stood a moment abashed, her colour coming and going; then she went to Ben-Hur, and said, with a womanliness singularly sweet: “I am not better than my mother was; and, as she is gone, I pray you, O my master, let me care for my father.”

Ben-Hur took her hand, and led her back to the chair, saying: “Thou art a good child. Have thy will.”

CHAPTER XX

THE PROGRAMME

THE day before the games, in the afternoon, all Ilderim's racing property was taken to the city, and put in quarters close by the Circus. He and Ben-Hur rode together in good spirits, calmly confident of success on the morrow.

On the way, they came upon Malluch in waiting for them. He exchanged salutations, and produced a paper, saying to the sheik:

"I have here the notice of the editor of the games, in which you will find your horses published for the race. You will find in it also the order of exercises. Without waiting, good sheik, I congratulate you upon your victory."

He gave him the paper, and, leaving him to master it, turned to Ben-Hur.

"To you also, son of Arrius, my congratulations. There is nothing now to prevent your meeting Messala. Every condition for the race is complied with. I have the assurance from the editor himself."

"I thank you, Malluch," said Ben-Hur.

"Your colour is white, and Messala's mixed scarlet and gold. Boys are now hawking white ribbons along the streets; to-morrow every Arab and Jew in the city will wear them. In the

Circus you will see the white fairly divide the galleries with the red."

"The galleries—but not the tribunal over the Gate of the Procession."

"No; the scarlet and gold will rule there. But if we win——" Malluch chuckled with the pleasure of the thought—"if we win, how the dignitaries will tremble! They will bet, of course, according to their scorn of everything not Roman—two, three, five to one on Messala, because he is Roman." Dropping his voice yet lower, he added: "It ill becomes a Jew of good standing in the Temple to put his money at such a hazard; yet, in confidence, I will have a friend—Sanballat by name—next behind the consul's seat to accept offers of three to one, or five, or ten—the madness may go to such height. I have put to his order six thousand shekels for the purpose."

"Nay, Malluch," said Ben-Hur, "a Roman will wager only in his Roman coin. Suppose you find your friend to-night, and place to his order sestertii in such amount as you choose. And look you, Malluch—let him be instructed to seek wagers with Messala and his supporters; Ilderim's four against Messala's."

Malluch reflected a moment.

"The effect will be to centre interest upon your contest."

"The very thing I seek, Malluch. Help me to fix the public eye upon our race—Messala's and mine." A look of determined will knit his handsome face, giving emphasis to his further speech. "Yes, it shall be. Hark, Malluch! Stop not in thy offer of sestertii.



“ BEN HUR, A JEW, DRIVER ”

Advance them to talents, if any there be who dare so high. Five, ten, twenty talents; ay, fifty, so the wager be with Messala himself. On our side be the God of our fathers! Go, good Malluch. Let this not slip."

Malluch, greatly delighted, gave him parting salutation, and was about to ride away, when Ben-Hur called him back.

"As thou art a son of Judah, Malluch, and faithful to thy kin, get thee a seat in the gallery over the Gate of Triumph, down close to the balcony in front of the pillars, and watch well when we make the turns there; watch well, for if I have favour at all, I will—— Nay, Malluch, let it go unsaid! Only get thee there, and watch well."

At that moment a cry burst from Ilderim.

"Ha! By the splendour of God! what is this?"

He drew near Ben-Hur with a finger pointing on the face of the notice. Ben-Hur took the paper, which, signed by the prefect of the province as editor, was in reality a programme, giving particularly the several events provided for the occasion. It informed the public that there would be first a procession of extraordinary splendour; that the procession would be followed by the customary honours to the god Consus, whereupon the games would begin; running, leaping, wrestling, boxing, each in the order stated. The names of the competitors were given, with their several nationalities and schools of training, the trials in which they had been engaged, the prizes won, and the prizes now offered.

Over these parts of the programme Ben-Hur sped with rapid eyes. At last he came to the

announcement of the race. He read it slowly. Attending lovers of the heroic sports were assured they would certainly be gratified by a struggle unparalleled in Antioch. The city offered the spectacle in honour of the consul. One hundred thousand sestertii and a crown of laurel were the prizes. Then followed the particulars. The entries were six in all—fours only permitted; and, to further interest in the performance, the competitors would be turned into the course together. Each four then received description.

“ I. A four of Lysippus the Corinthian—two greys, a bay, and a black; entered at Alexandria last year, and again at Corinth, where they were winners. Lysippus, driver. Colour, yellow.

“ II. A four of Messala of Rome—two white, two black; victors in the Circus Maximus last year. Messala, driver. Colours, scarlet and gold.

“ III. A four of Cleanthes the Athenian—three grey, one bay; winners at the Isthmian last year. Cleanthes, driver. Colour, green.

“ IV. A four of Dicæus the Byzantine—two black, one grey, one bay; winners this year at Byzantium. Dicæus, driver. Colour, black.

“ V. A four of Admetus the Sidonian—all greys. Thrice entered at Cæsarea, and thrice victors. Admetus, driver. Colour, blue.

“ VI. A four of Ilderim, sheik of the desert. All bays; First race. Ben-Hur, a Jew, driver. Colour, white.”

Ben-Hur, a Jew, driver?

Why that name instead of Arrius?

Ben-Hur raised his eyes to Ilderim. He had found the cause of the Arab's outcry. Both rushed to the same conclusion.

The hand was the hand of Messala!

CHAPTER XXI

THE CIRCUS

THE night before the race the entrances to the Circus were thrown wide, and the rabble, surging in, occupied the quarters assigned to them, from which nothing less than an earthquake or an army with spears could have dislodged them. They dozed the night away on the benches, and breakfasted there; and there the close of the exercises found them, patient and sight-hungry as in the beginning. The better people, their seats secured, began moving towards the Circus about the first hour of the morning, the noble and very rich among them distinguished by litters and retinues of liveried servants. By the second hour, the crowd from the city was an unbroken stream. When the sundial up in the citadel showed the second hour half gone, the legion, in full armour, and with all its standards, descended from Mount Sulpius; when the rear of the last cohort disappeared in the bridge, Antioch was literally abandoned—not that the Circus could hold the multitude, but that the multitude was gone out to it nevertheless.

A great crowd on the river shore witnessed the consul come over from the island in a barge

of state. As the great man landed, and was received by the legion, the martial show for one brief moment transcended the attraction of the Circus.

At last, a flourish of trumpets called for silence, and instantly the gaze of over a hundred thousand persons was directed towards the Gate of the Procession over in the east from which rises a confused sound of voices and music. Presently, forth comes the chorus of the procession with which the celebration begins; the editor and civic authorities of the city, givers of the games, follow in robes and garlands; then the gods, some on platforms borne by men, others in great four-wheel carriages gorgeously decorated; next them, again the competitors of the day, each in costume exactly as he will run, wrestle, leap, box, or drive.

Slowly crossing the arena, the procession proceeds to make circuit of the course. The display is beautiful and imposing. Approval runs before it in a shout, as the water rises and swells in front of a boat in motion.

The reception of the athletes is even more demonstrative, for there is not a man in the audience who has not something in wager upon them, though but a mite or farthing. And it is noticeable, as the classes move by, that the favourites among them are speedily singled out: either their names are loudest in the uproar, or they are more profusely showered with wreaths and garlands tossed to them from the balcony.

If there is a question as to the popularity with the public of the several games, it is

now put to rest. To the splendour of the chariots and the beauty of the horses, the charioteers add the personality necessary to perfect the charm of their display. Their tunics, short, sleeveless, and of the finest woollen texture, are of the chosen colours. A horseman accompanies each one of them except Ben-Hur, who, for some reason—possibly distrust—has chosen to go alone; so, too, they are all helmeted but him. As they approach, the spectators stand upon the benches, and there is a sensible deepening of the uproar, in which a sharp listener may detect the shrill piping of women and children; at the same time, the flowers flying from the balcony thicken into a storm, and, striking the men, drop into the chariot-beds, which are threatened with filling to the tops. Even the horses have a share in the ovation; nor may it be said they are less conscious than their masters of the honours they receive.

As the charioteers move on in the circuit, the excitement increases; at the second goal, where, especially in the galleries, the white is the ruling colour, the people exhaust their flowers and rive the air with screams.

“Messala! Messala!”

“Ben-Hur! Ben-Hur!”

“Ah, by Bacchus! was he not handsome?” exclaims a woman, whose Romanism is betrayed by the colours flying in her hair.

“And how splendid his chariot!” replies a neighbour. “It is all ivory and gold. Jupiter grant he wins.”

The notes on the bench behind them were entirely different.

“A hundred shekels on the Jew!”

The voice is high and shrill.

“Nay, be thou not rash,” whispers a prudent friend to the speaker. “The children of Jacob are not much given to Gentile sports, which are too often accursed in the sight of the Lord.”

“True, but saw you ever one more cool and assured? And what an arm he has!”

“And what horses!” says a third.

“And for that,” a fourth one adds, “they say he has all the tricks of the Romans.”

A woman completes the praise.

“Yes, and he is even handsomer than the Roman.”

Thus encouraged, the enthusiast shrieks again: “A hundred shekels on the Jew!”

“Thou fool!” answers a man of Antioch, from a bench well forward on the balcony. “Knowest thou not there are fifty talents laid against him, six to one, on Messala? Put up the shekels, lest Abraham rise and smite thee.”

“Ha, ha! thou ass of Antioch! Cease thy bray. Knowest thou not it was Messala betting on himself?”

When at length the march was ended, and the Gate received back the procession, Ben-Hur knew he had his prayer.

The eyes of the East were upon his contest with Messala.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RACE

ABOUT three o'clock, speaking in modern style, the programme was concluded except the chariot-race. At once the doors were thrown open, and all who could, hastened to the portico outside in search of refreshments. Those who remained, yawned, talked, gossiped, consulted their tablets, and, all distinctions else forgotten, merged into but two classes—the winners, who were happy, and the losers, who were glum and captious.

Before the recess ended Simonides arrived, and with him Sheik Ilderim and Esther. They were yet making their first examination of the great spectacle, beginning with the consul and his attendants, when some workmen ran in and began to stretch a chalked rope across the arena from balcony to balcony in front of the pillars of the first goal. About the same time, also, six men came in through the Gate of the Procession and took post, one in front of each occupied stall; whereat there was a prolonged hum of voices in every quarter.

“See, see! The green goes to number four on the right; the Athenian is there.”

“And Messala—yes, he is in number two.”

“The Corinthian——”

“Watch the white! See, he crosses over, he stops; number one it is—number one on the left.”

“No, the black stops there, and the white at number two.”

“So it is.”

These gate-keepers, it should be understood, were dressed in tunics coloured like those of the competing charioteers; so, when they took their stations, everybody knew the particular stall in which his favourite was that moment waiting.

At length the recess came to an end.

The trumpeters blew a call at which the absent ones rushed back to their places. At the same time, some attendants appeared in the arena, and, climbing upon the division wall, went to a pillar near the second goal at the west end, and placed upon it seven wooden balls; then returning to the first goal, upon a pillar there they set up seven other pieces of wood hewn to represent dolphins.

“What shall they do with the balls and fishes, O sheik?” asked Esther.

“Hast thou never attended a race?”

“Never before.”

“Well, they are to keep the count. At the end of each round run thou shalt see one ball and one fish taken down.”

The preparations were now complete, and presently a trumpeter in gaudy uniform arose by the editor, ready to blow the signal of commencement promptly at his order. Straightway the stir of the people and the hum of their

conversation died away. Every face turned to the east, as all eyes settled upon the gates of the six stalls which shut in the competitors.

Ilderim pulled his beard fast and furious, and Esther, with close-drawn veil and beating heart, sat watching for Ben-Hur.

The trumpet sounded short and sharp; whereupon the starters, one for each chariot, leaped down from behind the pillars of the goal, ready to give assistance if any of the fours proved unmanageable.

Again the trumpet blew, and immediately the gate-keepers threw the stalls open.

First appeared the mounted attendants of the charioteers, five in all, Ben-Hur having rejected the service. The chalked line was lowered to let them pass, then raised again. They were beautifully mounted, yet scarcely observed as they rode forward; for all the time the trampling of eager horses, and the voices of drivers scarcely less eager, were heard behind in the stalls, so that one might not look away an instant from the open doors.

The chalked line up again, the gate-keepers called their men, instantly the ushers on the balcony waved their hands, and shouted with all their strength, "Down! down!"

As well have whistled to stay a storm.

Forth from each stall, like shots from so many great guns, rushed the six fours; and up the vast audience arose, in wild excitement, and leaping upon the benches, filled the Circus and the air above it with yells and screams. This was the time for which they had so

patiently waited!—this the moment of supreme interest treasured up in talk and dreams since the proclamation of the games!

The competitors could now be seen from nearly every part of the Circus, yet the race was not begun; they had first to make the chalked line successfully.

The line was stretched for the purpose of equalizing the start. If it were dashed upon, overthrow of man and horses might be the result; on the other hand, to approach it timidly was to incur the hazard of being thrown behind in the beginning of the race; and that was certain forfeit of the great advantage always striven for—the position next the division wall on the inner line of the course.

The arena swam in a dazzle of light; yet each driver looked first for the rope, then for the coveted inner line. So, all six aiming at the same point and speeding furiously, a collision seemed inevitable; nor that merely. What if the umpire, at the last moment, dissatisfied with the start, should withhold the signal to drop the rope? Or if he should not give it in time!

The crossing was about two hundred and fifty feet in width. Quick the eye, steady the hand, unerring the judgment required. If now one look away! or his mind wander! or a rein slip!

Let the reader first look down upon the arena, and see it glistening in its frame of dull-grey granite walls; let him then, in this perfect field, see the chariots, light of wheel, very graceful, and bright as paint and burnishing can make them—Messala's rich with ivory and

gold; let him see the drivers, erect and undisturbed by the motion of the cars, their limbs naked, and fresh and ruddy with the healthful polish of the baths—in their right hands goads, in their left hands, held in careful separation, and high, that they may not interfere with view of the steeds, the reins passing taut from the fore ends of the carriage poles; let him see the fours, chosen for beauty as well as speed; let him see them in magnificent action, their masters not more conscious of the situation, and all that is asked and hoped from them—their heads tossing, nostrils in play, now extended, now contracted—limbs too dainty for the sand which they touch but to spurn—limbs slender, yet with impact crushing as hammers—every muscle of the rounded bodies instinct with glorious life.

The competitors having started, each on the shortest line for the position next the wall, yielding would be like giving up the race, and who dared yield? The cries of encouragement from the balcony were indescribable; a roar which had the same effect upon all the drivers.

The fours neared the rope together. Then the trumpeter by the umpire's side blew a signal vigorously. Twenty feet away it was not heard. Seeing the action, however, the judges dropped the rope, and not an instant too soon, for the hoof of one of Messala's horses struck it as it fell. Nothing daunted, the Roman shook out his long lash, loosed the reins, leaned forward, and, with a triumphant shout, took the wall.

“Jove with us! Jove with us!” yelled all the Roman faction, in a frenzy of delight.

As Messala turned in, the bronze lion's head at the end of his axle caught the foreleg of the Athenian's right-hand trace-mate, flinging the brute over against its yoke-fellow. Both staggered, struggled, and lost their headway. The thousands held their breath with horror; only up where the consul sat was there shouting.

“Jove with us!” screamed Drusus frantically.

“He wins! Jove with us!” answered his comrades, seeing Messala speed on.

Tablet in hand, Malluch's friend, Sanballat turned to them; a crash from the course below stopped his speech, and he could not but look that way.

Messala having passed, the Corinthian was the only competitor on the Athenian's right, and to that side the latter tried to turn his broken four; and then, as ill fortune would have it, the wheel of the Byzantine, who was next on the left, struck the tail-piece of his chariot, knocking his feet from under him. There was a crash, a scream of rage and fear, and the unfortunate Cleanthes fell under the hoofs of his own steeds; a terrible sight, against which Esther covered her eyes.

On swept the Corinthian, on the Byzantine, on the Sidonian.

Sanballat looked for Ben-Hur, and turned again to Drusus and his friends.

“A hundred sestertii on the Jew!” he cried.

“Taken!” answered Drusus.

“Another hundred on the Jew!” shouted Sanballat.

Nobody appeared to hear him. He called again, the situation below was too absorbing, and they were too busy shouting: "Messala! Messala! Jove with us!"

When Esther ventured to look again, Ben-Hur, unhurt, was to the front, coursing freely forward along with the Roman. Behind them, in a group, followed the Sidonian, the Corinthian, and the Byzantine. The race was on; the souls of the racers were in it.

II

When the dash for position began, Ben-Hur, as we have seen, was on the extreme left of the six. For a moment, like the others, he was half-blinded by the light in the arena; yet he managed to catch sight of his antagonists and divine their purpose. At Messala, who was more than an antagonist to him, he gave one searching look. The air of passionless pride characteristic of the fine patrician face was there as of old, and so was the Italian beauty, which the helmet rather increased; but more—it may have been a jealous fancy, or the effect of the brassy shadow in which the features were at the moment cast, still the Israelite thought he saw the soul of the man as through a glass, darkly: cruel, cunning, desperate, not so excited as determined—a soul in a tension of watchfulness and fierce resolve.

In a time not longer than was required to turn to his four again, Ben-Hur felt his own

resolution harden to a like temper. At whatever cost, at all hazards, he would humble this enemy! Prize, friends, wagers, honour—everything that can be thought of as a possible interest in the race was lost in the one deliberate purpose. Regard for life even should not hold him back. Yet there was no passion on his part; no blinding rush of heated blood from heart to brain, and back again; no impulse to fling himself upon Fortune—he did not believe in Fortune; far otherwise. He had his plan, and, confiding in himself, he settled to the task never more watchful, never more capable.

When not half-way across the arena, he saw that Messala's rush would, if there was no collision, and the rope fell, give him the wall; that the rope would fall, he ceased as soon to doubt; and, further, it came to him, a sudden flash-like insight, that Messala knew it was to be let drop at the last moment (prearrangement with the umpire could safely reach that point in the contest); and it suggested, what more Roman-like than for the official to lend himself to a countryman who, besides being so popular, had also so much at stake? There could be no other accounting for the confidence with which Messala pushed his four forward the instant his competitors were prudently checking their fours in front of the obstruction—no other except madness.

It is one thing to see a necessity and another to act upon it. Ben-Hur yielded the wall for the time.

The rope fell, and all the fours but his sprang into the course urged of voice and lash alike.

He drew head to the right, and with all the speed of his Arabs, darted across the trails of his opponents, the angle of movement being such as to lose the least time and gain the greatest possible advance. So, while the spectators were shivering at the Athenian's mishap, and the Sidonian, Byzantine, and Corinthian were striving, with such skill as they possessed, to avoid being entangled in the ruin, Ben-Hur swept around and took the course neck and neck with Messala, though on the outside. The marvellous skill shown in making the change thus from the extreme left across to the right without much loss did not fail the sharp eyes upon the benches; the Circus seemed to rock and rock again with prolonged applause.

And now, racing together side by side, a narrow interval between them, the two neared the second goal.

The pedestal of the three pillars there, viewed from the west, was a stone wall in the form of a half-circle, around which the course and opposite balcony were bent. Making this turn was considered in all respects the most telling test of a charioteer. A hush fell over all the Circus, so that for the first time in the race the rattle and clang of the cars plunging after the tugging steeds were distinctly heard. Then, it would seem, Messala observed Ben-Hur, and recognized him; and at once the audacity of the man flamed out in an astonishing manner.

"Down Eros, up Mars!" he shouted, whirling his lash with practised hand—"Down Eros, up Mars!" he repeated, and caught the well-

doing Arabs of Ben-Hur a cut the like of which they had never known.

The blow was seen in every quarter, and the amazement was universal. The silence deepened; up on the benches behind the consul the boldest held his breath, waiting for the outcome. Only a moment thus: then, involuntarily, down from the balcony, as thunder falls, burst the indignant cry of the people.

The four sprang forward terrified. No hand had ever been laid upon them except in love; they had been nurtured tenderly; and as they grew, their confidence in man became a lesson to men beautiful to see. What should such dainty natures do under such indignity but leap as from death?

Forward they sprang as with one impulse, and forward leaped the car. Past question, every experience is serviceable to us. Where got Ben-Hur the large hand and mighty grip which helped him now so well? Where but from the oar with which so long he fought the sea? And what was this spring of the floor under his feet to the dizzy lurch with which in the old time the trembling ship yielded to the beat of staggering waves? So he kept his place, and gave the four free rein, and called to them in soothing voice, trying merely to guide them round the dangerous turn; and before the fever of the people began to abate, he had back the mastery. Nor that only; on approaching the first goal, he was again side by side with Messala, bearing with him the sympathy and admiration of every one not a Roman. So clearly was the

feeling shown, so vigorous its manifestation, that Messala, with all his boldness, felt it unsafe to trifle further.

Immediately a man climbed on the pillar at the west end of the division wall, and took down one of the conical wooden balls. A dolphin on the east pillar was taken down at the same time.

In like manner, the second ball and second dolphin disappeared.

And then the third ball and third dolphin.

Three rounds concluded; still Messala held the inside position; still Ben-Hur moved with him side by side; still the other competitors followed as before. The contest began to have the appearance of one of the double races which became so popular in Rome during the later Cæsarean period—Messala and Ben-Hur in the first, the Corinthian, Sidonian, and Byzantine in the second.

In the fifth round the Sidonian succeeded in getting a place outside Ben-Hur, but lost it directly.

The sixth round was entered upon without change of relative position.

Gradually the speed had been quickened—gradually the blood of the competitors warmed with the work. Men and beasts seemed to know alike that the final crisis was near, bringing the time for the winner to assert himself.

The interest which from the beginning had centred chiefly in the struggle between the Roman and the Jew, with an intense and general sympathy for the latter, was fast changing to anxiety on his account. On all the benches the

spectators bent forward motionless, except as their faces turned following the contestants. Ilderim quitted combing his beard, and Esther forgot her fears.

"A hundred sestertii on the Jew!" cried Sanballat to the Romans under the consul's awning.

There was no reply.

"A talent—or five talents, or ten; choose ye!"

He shook his tablets at them defiantly.

"I will take thy sestertii," answered a Roman youth, preparing to write.

"Do not so," interposed a friend.

"Why?"

"Messala hath reached his utmost speed. See him lean over his chariot-rim, the reins loose as flying ribbons. Look then at the Jew?"

The first one looked.

"By Hercules!" he replied, his countenance falling. "The dog throws all his weight on the bits. I see, I see! If the gods help not our friend, he will be run away with by the Israelite. No, not yet. Look! Jove with us, Jove with us!"

The cry, swelled by every Latin tongue, shook the awning over the consul's head.

III

If it were true that Messala had attained his utmost speed, the effort was with effect; slowly but certainly he was beginning to forge ahead. His horses were running with their heads low

down; from the balcony their bodies appeared actually to skim the earth; their nostrils showed blood-red; their eyes seemed straining in their sockets. Certainly the good steeds were doing their best! How long could they keep the pace? It was but the beginning of the sixth round. On they dashed. As they neared the second goal, Ben-Hur turned in behind the Roman's car.

The joy of the Messala faction reached its bound: they screamed and howled, and tossed their colours; and Sanballat filled his tablets with wagers of their offering.

Malluch, in the lower gallery over the Gate of Triumph, found it hard to keep his cheer. He had cherished the vague hint dropped to him by Ben-Hur of something to happen in the turning of the western pillars. It was the fifth round, yet the something had not come; and he had said to himself, the sixth will bring it; but, lo! Ben-Hur was hardly holding a place at the tail of his enemy's car.

Over in the east end, Simonides' party held their peace. The merchant's head was bent low. Ilderim tugged at his beard, and Esther scarcely breathed.

Along the home-stretch—sixth round—Messala leading, next him Ben-Hur. Thus to the first goal, and round it. Messala, fearful of losing his place, hugged the stony wall with perilous clasp; a foot to the left, and he had been dashed to pieces; yet, when the turn was finished, no man, looking at the wheel-tracks of the two cars, could have said, here went

Messala, there the Jew. They left but one trace behind them.

As they whirled by, Esther saw Ben-Hur's face; it was white but calm, and Simonides said to Ilderim, "I am no judge, good sheik, if Ben-Hur be not about to execute some design. His face hath that look."

To which Ilderim answered: "Saw you how clean they were and fresh? By the splendour of God, my friend, they have not been running! But now watch!"

One ball and one dolphin remained on the pillars; and all the people drew a long breath, for the beginning of the end was at hand.

First, the Sidonian gave the scourge to his four, and, smarting with fear and pain, they dashed desperately forward, promising for a brief time to go to the front. The effort ended in promise. Next, the Byzantine and Corinthian each made the trial with like result, after which they were practically out of the race. Thereupon, all the factions except the Romans joined hope in Ben-Hur, and openly indulged their feeling.

"Ben-Hur! Ben-Hur!" they shouted, and the blent voices of the many rolled overwhelmingly against the consular stand.

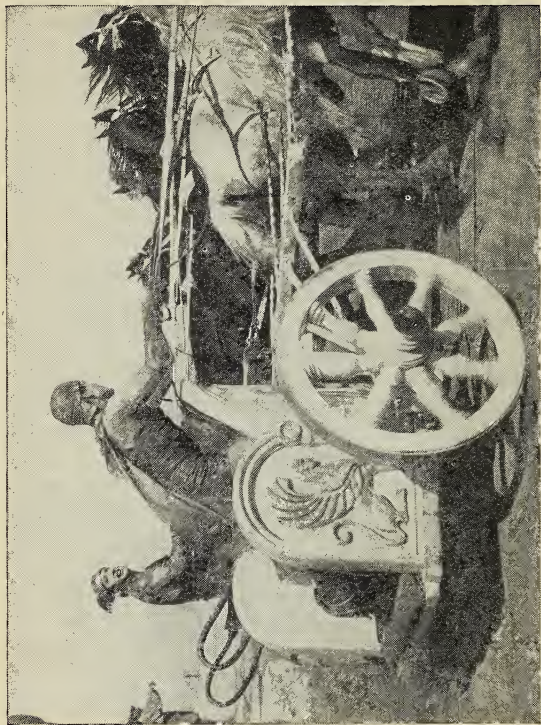
From the benches above him as he passed, came wild cries of encouragement.

"Speed thee, Jew!"

"Take the wall now!"

"On! loose the Arabs! Give them rein and scourge!"

"Let him not have the turn on thee again. Now or never!"



“THE MOMENT CHOSEN FOR THE DASH”

Over the balustrade they stooped low, stretching their hands imploringly to him.

Either he did not hear, or could not do better, for half-way round the course, and he was still following; at the second goal even still no change!

And now, to make the turn, Messala began to draw in his left-hand steeds, an act which necessarily slackened their speed. His spirit was high; more than one altar was richer of his vows; the Roman genius was still uppermost. On the three pillars only six hundred feet away were fame, increase of fortune, promotions, and a triumph ineffably sweetened by hate, all in store for him!

That moment Malluch, in the gallery, saw Ben-Hur lean forward over his Arabs, and give them the rein. Out flew the many-folded lash in his hand; over the backs of the startled steeds it writhed and hissed, and hissed and writhed again and again; and though it fell not, there were both sting and menace in its quick report; and as the man passed thus from quiet to resistless action, his face flushed, his eyes gleaming, along the reins he seemed to flash his will; and instantly not one, but the four as one, answered with a leap that landed them alongside the Roman's car.

Messala, on the perilous edge of the goal, heard, but dared not look to see what the awakening meant. From the people he received no sign. Above the noise of the race there was but one voice, and that was Ben-Hur's. In the old Aramaic, as the sheik himself, he called to the Arabs:

“On, Atair! On, Rigel! What, Antares! dost thou linger now? Good horse—oho, Aldebaran! I hear them singing in the tents. I hear the children singing and the women—singing of the stars, of Atair, Antares, Rigel, Aldebaran, victory!—and the song will never end. Well done! Home to-morrow, under the black tent—home! On, Antares! The tribe is waiting for us, and the master is waiting! ’Tis done! ’tis done! Ha, ha! We have overthrown the proud! The hand that smote us in the dust. Ours the glory! Ha, ha!—steady! The work is done—soho! Rest!”

There had never been anything of the kind more simple; seldom anything so swift.

At the moment chosen for the dash, Messala was moving in a circle round the goal. To pass him, Ben-Hur had to cross the track, and good strategy required the movement to be in a forward direction; that is, on a like circle limited to the least possible increase. The thousands on the benches understood it all; they saw the signal given—the magnificent response; the four close outside Messala’s outer wheel; Ben-Hur’s inner wheel behind the other’s car—all this they saw. Then they heard a crash loud enough to send a thrill through the Circus, and, quicker than thought, out over the course a spray of shining white and yellow flinders flew.

Down on its right side toppled the bed of the Roman’s chariot. There was a rebound as of the axle hitting the hard earth; another and another; then the car went to pieces; and Messala, entangled in the reins, pitched forward headlong.

To increase the horror of the sight by making death certain, the Sidonian, who had the wall next behind, could not stop or turn out. Into the wreck full speed he drove; then over the Roman, and into the latter's four, all mad with fear. Presently, out of the turmoil, the fighting of horses, the resound of blows, the murky cloud of dust and sand, he crawled, in time to see the Corinthian and Byzantine go on down the course after Ben-Hur, who had not been an instant delayed.

The people arose, and leaped upon the benches, and shouted and screamed. Those who looked that way caught glimpses of Messala, now under the trampling of the fours, now under the abandoned cars. He was still; they thought him dead; but far the greater number followed Ben-Hur in his career. They had not seen the cunning touch of the reins by which, turning a little to the left, he caught Messala's wheel with the iron-shod point of his axle, and crushed it; but they had seen the transformation of the man, and themselves felt the heat and glow of his spirit, the heroic resolution, the maddening energy of action with which, by look, word, and gesture, he so suddenly inspired his Arabs. And such running! It was rather the long leaping of lions in harness; but for the lumbering chariot, it seemed the four were flying. When the Byzantine and Corinthian were half-way down the course, Ben-Hur turned the first goal.

And the race was won!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OLD HOME

I

SOME thirty days later, a man was climbing the eastern face of Mount Olivet. The road was rough and dusty, and vegetation on that side burnt brown, for it was the dry season in Judea. Well for the traveller that he had youth and strength, not to speak of the cool flowing garments with which he was clothed.

He proceeded slowly, looking often to his right and left; not with the vexed anxious expression which marks a man going forward uncertain of the way, but rather the air with which one approaches an old acquaintance after a long separation—half of pleasure, half of enquiry; as if he were saying: "I am glad to be with you again; let me see in what you are changed."

As he arose higher, he sometimes paused to look behind him over the gradually widening view ending in the mountains of Moab; but when at length he drew near the summit, he quickened his step, unmindful of fatigue, and hurried on without pause or turning of the face. On the summit—to reach which he bent his steps somewhat right of the beaten path—

he came to a dead stop, arrested as if by a strong hand. Then one might have seen his eyes dilate, his cheeks flush, his breath quicken, effects all of one bright sweeping glance at what lay before him.

The traveller was no other than Ben-Hur; the spectacle, Jerusalem.

Not the Holy City of to-day, but the Holy City as left by Herod—the Holy City of the Christ. Beautiful yet, as seen from old Olivet, what must it have been then?

Ben-Hur betook him to a stone and sat down, and stripping his head of the close white handkerchief which served it for covering, turned his thought homeward. There was a point in the sky a little north of the peerless front of the Holy of Holies upon which he fixed his gaze; under it, straight as a lead line would have dropped, lay his father's house, if yet the house remained.

Out in the desert while with Ilderim, a messenger came one evening with the news that Gratus was removed, and Pontius Pilate sent to take his place. Messala was disabled; Gratus was powerless and gone; why should Ben-Hur longer defer the search for his mother and sister? There was nothing to fear now. If he could not himself see into the prisons of Judea, he could examine them with the eyes of others. If the lost were found, Pilate could have no motive in holding them prisoners—none, at least, which could not be overcome by money. If found, he would carry them to a place of safety, and devote himself to their happiness.

Now, first of all things, he would go to the old house. Thus resolved, he arose shortly after the going down of the sun, and began the descent of the Mount. Down nearly at the foot, close by the bed of Cedron, he fell in with a herdsman driving some sheep to market, and in his company passed by Gethsemane on into the city through the Fish Gate.

It was dark when, parting with the drover inside the gate, he turned into a narrow lane leading to the south. A few of the people whom he met saluted him. The pavement was rough. The houses on both sides were low, dark, and cheerless; the doors all closed: from the roofs, occasionally, he heard women crooning to children. The loneliness of the situation, the night, the uncertainty before him, all affected him cheerlessly. With feelings sinking lower and lower, he came directly to the northern wall of the Tower of Antonia, a black frowning heap reared into the dim steel-grey sky. He halted as if challenged by a threatening sentinel.

The Tower stood up so high, and seemed so vast, resting apparently upon foundations so sure, that he was forced to acknowledge its strength. If his mother were there in living burial, what could he do for her? By the strong hand, nothing. An army might beat itself against that stony face, and be laughed at. In doubt and misgiving, he turned into the street in front of the Tower, and following it slowly on to the west, came, at length, to his father's house.

At the gate on the north side he stopped. In the corners the wax used in the sealing up

was still plainly seen, and across the valves was the board with the inscription:

“THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF
THE EMPEROR.”

Nobody had gone in or out the gate since the dreadful day of the separation. Silently he stole round to the south. There, too, the gate was sealed and inscribed. The mellow splendour of the August moon, pouring over the crest of Olivet, since termed the Mount of Offence, brought the lettering boldly out; and he read, and was filled with rage. All he could do was to wrench the board from its nailing, and hurl it into the ditch. Then, utterly worn out by sorrow and fatigue, he dropped upon the step, and fell fast asleep.

II

About that time two women came down the street from the direction of the Tower of Antonia, approaching the palace of the Hurs. They advanced stealthily, with timid steps, pausing often to listen. At the corner of the rugged pile, one said to the other, in a low voice:

“This is it, Tirzah!”

And Tirzah, after a look, caught her mother's hand, and leaned upon her heavily, sobbing, but silent.

“Let us go on, my child, because”—the mother hesitated and trembled;—“because when

morning comes they will put us out of the gate of the city to—return no more.”

Tirzah sank almost to the stones.

“ Ah, yes!” she said, between sobs; “ I forgot. I had the feeling of going home. But we are lepers, and have no homes; we belong to the dead!”

The mother stooped and raised her tenderly, saying: “ We have nothing to fear. Let us go on.”

Creeping in close to the rough wall, they glided on, like two ghosts, till they came to the gate, and seeing the board, they stepped upon the stone in the scarce cold tracks of Ben-Hur, and read the inscription: “ This is the Property of the Emperor.”

Then the mother clasped her hands, and, with upraised eyes, moaned in unutterable anguish.

“ Oh, Tirzah! He is dead! They took everything from him—everything—even this house!”

Tirzah leaned upon her again, and said, whispering: “ Let us—let us die!”

“ No!” the mother said firmly. “ The Lord has appointed our times. We will wait on Him even in this. Come away!”

She caught Tirzah’s hand as she spoke, and hastened to the west corner of the house, keeping close to the wall. Casting one look back and up to the windows she stepped out into the light, drawing Tirzah after her.

“ Hist!” she whispered suddenly, “ There is someone lying upon the step—a man. Let us go round him.”

They crossed to the opposite side of the street

quickly, and in the shade there, moved on till before the gate, where they stopped.

“He is asleep, Tirzah! Stay here, and I will try the gate.”

So saying, the mother stole noiselessly across and ventured to touch the wicket; she never knew if it yielded, for that moment the man sighed, and, turning restlessly, shifted the handkerchief on his head in such manner that the face was left upturned and fair in the broad moonlight. She looked down at it and started; then looked again, stooping a little, and arose and clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven in mute appeal. An instant so, and she ran back to Tirzah.

“As the Lord liveth, the man is my son—thy brother!” she said, in an awe-inspiring whisper.

“My brother?—Judah?”

The mother caught her hand eagerly.

“Come!” she said, in the same enforced whisper. “Let us look at him together—once more—only once—then help Thou Thy servants, Lord!”

They crossed the street hand in hand ghostly-quick, ghostly still. When their shadows fell upon him they stopped. One of his hands was lying out upon the step palm up. Tirzah fell upon her knees, and would have kissed it; but the mother drew her back.

“Not for thy life; not for thy life! Unclean, unclean!” she whispered.

Tirzah shrank from him, as if he were the leprous one.

He stirred, and tossed his hand. They moved back, but heard him mutter in his dream:

“Mother! Amrah! Where is——”

Tirzah stared wistfully. The mother put her face in the dust, struggling to suppress a sob so deep and strong it seemed her heart was bursting. Almost she wished he might waken. He had asked for her; she was not forgotten; in his sleep he was thinking of her. Was it not enough?

Presently the mother beckoned to Tirzah, and they arose, and taking one more look, as if to print his image past fading, hand in hand they recrossed the street. Back in the shade of the wall there, they knelt, looking at him, waiting for him to wake—waiting some revelation, they knew not what.

By and by, the sleep being yet upon him, another woman appeared at the corner of the palace. The two in the shade saw her plainly in the light; a small figure, much bent, dark-skinned, grey-haired, dressed neatly in servant's garb, and carrying a basket full of vegetables.

At sight of the man upon the step the newcomer stopped; then, as if decided, she walked on—very lightly as she drew near the sleeper. Passing round him, she went to the gate, slid the wicket latch easily to one side, and put her hand in the opening. One of the broad boards in the left valve swung ajar without noise. She put the basket through, and was about to follow, when, yielding to curiosity, she lingered to have one look at the stranger whose face was below her in open view.

The spectators across the street heard a low exclamation, and saw the woman rub her eyes

as if to renew their power, bend closer down, clasp her hands, gaze wildly around, look at the sleeper, stoop and raise the outlying hand, and kiss it fondly—that which they wished so mightily to do, but dared not.

Awakened by the action, Ben-Hur withdrew the hand; as he did so, his eyes met the woman's.

“Amrah! O Amrah, is it thou?” he said.

The good heart made no answer in words, but fell upon his neck crying for joy.

Gently he put her arms away, and lifting the dark face wet with tears, kissed it, his joy only a little less than hers. Then those across the way heard him say:

“Mother—Tirzah—O Amrah, tell me of them! Speak, speak, I pray thee! Thou hast seen them, Amrah. Thou knowest where they are; tell me they are at home.”

Tirzah moved, but the mother, guessing her purpose, caught her and whispered: “Do not go—not for life. Unclean, unclean!”

Though both their hearts broke, he should not become what they were.

Meantime Amrah, so entreated, only wept more.

“Wert thou going in?” he asked presently, seeing the board swung back. “Come, then, I will go with thee.” He arose as he spoke. “The Romans—be the curse of the Lord upon them!—the Romans lied. The house is mine. Rise, Amrah, and let us go in.”

A moment and they were gone, leaving the two in the shade to behold the gate staring blankly at them—the gate which they might not ever enter more.

CHAPTER XXIV

AMRAH'S FIDELITY

THE second morning after the incidents of the last chapter, Amrah, passing out of the city by the Fish Gate, made her way to the well of En-rogel. She brought with her a water-jar, and placing it on the ground at her side, she loosened the shawl which fell from her head, knit her fingers together in her lap, and gazed up to where the hill drops steeply down into Aceldama and the Potter's Field.

It was very early, and she was the first to arrive at the well. Soon, however, a man came, bringing a rope and a leathern bucket. Seeing the jar, he asked after a while if she wished it filled; she answered him civilly: "Not now;" whereupon he gave her no more attention.

Shortly after sunrise, when business at the well was most pressing, and the drawer of water most hurried, [the lepers, who dwelt upon the Hill of Evil Council hard by, began to come down for their daily allowance of water. As Amrah looked at them pitifully, two among them caught her attention. They were women]—both white-haired; both looked old; but their garments were not rent, and they gazed about them as if the place were new. They

moved slowly, painfully, and with much fear towards the well, whereat several voices were raised to stop them; and the drawer of water, picking up some pebbles, made ready to drive them back.

"Surely," thought Amrah, "surely, they are strangers to the usage of lepers."

She picked up her jar, and turned away.

"Amrah," said one of the lepers.

The Egyptian dropped the jar, and looked back, trembling.

"Who called me?" she asked.

"Amrah."

The servant's wondering eyes settled upon the speaker's face.

"Who are you?" she cried.

"We are they you are seeking."

Amrah fell upon her knees.

"O, my mistress, my mistress! As I have made your God my God, be He praised that He has led me to you!"

And upon her knees the poor overwhelmed creature began moving forward.

"Stay, Amrah! Come not nearer. Unclean, unclean!"

The words sufficed. Amrah fell upon her face, sobbing so loud the people at the well heard her. Suddenly she arose upon her knees again.

"O my mistress, [my mistress, how came you to this pass?"

"For eight years—ever since that unhappy day you know of—we have been imprisoned in a leprous cell—put there by Valerius Gratus

to die and be lost. The new Procurator has released us, and—and——”]

“And Judah has come home, seeking you,” Amrah sobbed.

“Yes, I know that Judah has come home. I saw him at the gate the night before last asleep on the step. I saw you wake him.”

“O, my mistress! You saw it, and did not come!”

“That would have been to kill him. I can never take him in my arms again. I can never kiss him more. O Amrah, Amrah, you love him, I know!”

“Yes,” said the true heart, bursting into tears again, and kneeling. “I would die for him.”

“Then you shall not tell him where we are, or that you have seen us—only that, Amrah. He must not find us. He shall not become what we are. Hear, Amrah! You shall bring us the little we need—not long now—not long. You shall come every morning and evening, and—and——” the voice trembled, the strong will almost broke down—“and you shall tell us of him, Amrah; but to him you shall say nothing of us. Hear you?”

“The burden will be heavy, O my mistress, and hard to bear,” said Amrah, falling upon her face.

“How much harder would it be to see him as we are!” the mother answered. “Come again this evening,” she repeated; and taking up the jar of water that Amrah had put for her, she turned away.

Amrah waited kneeling until they had disappeared; then she took the road sorrowfully home.

CHAPTER XXV

GLAD TIDINGS

THE winter months rolled by, and spring came, with gladdening showers blown over from the summering sea in the west; [and still to Ben Hur came no tidings of his mother and sister. Unknown to him, each morning and each evening, Amrah went sadly down to the well, bearing food to the outcasts, until, at last there came a day when she went not sadly but with the joyous step of one who brings good news.

She did not wait by the well; she went up the hillside, straight to the cave wherein her mistress and Tirzah lived, and despite their warning cry of "Unclean! Unclean!" flung herself at their feet.

"Oh, my mistress, my mistress!" she said brokenly, "I bring you glad tidings.] There is a wonderful man, who has power to cure you. He speaks a word, and the sick are made well, and even the dead come to life. I have come to take you to Him."

"Poor Amrah!" said Tirzah compassionately.

"No," cried Amrah, detecting the doubt underlying the expression—"no, as the Lord lives, even the Lord of Israel, my God as well as yours, I

“speak the truth. This very morning He will pass by on His way to the city. See! the day is at hand. Take the food here—eat, and let us go.”

“Who is He?” the mother asked, striving to still the beating of her heart.

“A Nazarene. Judah was travelling with Him, and heard the lepers call, and saw them go away well. First there was one man; then there were ten; and they were all made whole.”

There was silence for a while, and then, quite simply the mother said: “This must be the Messiah!”

She spoke not coldly, like one reasoning a doubt away, but as a woman of Israel familiar with the promises of God to her race.

“There was a time when Jerusalem and all Judea were filled with a story that He was born. I remember it. By this time He should be a man. It must be—it is He. Oh, Amrah! Oh, Tirzah! Think—home is but a little way off; and Judah will be there to receive us! Let us eat and be gone!”

Guided by Amrah, they went down into the road below Mount Olivet, for by that way the Nazarene would pass. And there, in the shelter of a rock, they waited for His coming.

CHAPTER XXVI

HEALED

I

HE came about the fourth hour, a great multitude around Him. He rode bare-headed and clad in white. His olive-hued face was shaded by long chestnut hair. The sun beat upon the back of His head, and lighting up the floating hair gave it a delicate likeness to a golden halo.

“He is here, Tirzah,” the mother said; “He is here. Come, my child.”

As she spoke she glided in front of the white rock and fell upon her knees, while about Him the multitude waved green branches, shouting, or rather chanting (for it was all in one voice):

“Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!”

“Nearer, my child—let us get nearer. He cannot hear us,” said the mother.

She arose and staggered forward. And seeing her, He stopped.

“O Master, Master! Thou seest our need; Thou canst make us clean. Have mercy upon us—mercy!”

“Believest thou I am able to do this?” He asked.

“Thou art He of whom the prophets spake—Thou art the Messiah!” she replied.

His eyes grew radiant, His manner confident.

“Woman,” He said, “great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”

He lingered an instant, apparently unconscious of the presence of the throng—an instant—then He rode away, and the multitude closed about Him.

“To God in the highest, glory! Blessed, thrice blessed, the Son whom He hath given us!”

II

But one there was who did not go—Ben-Hur. He had heard the woman’s prayer, and seen her disfigured face; he heard the Master’s answer.

Now, checking his horse, he dismounted and crossed the road towards the two women.

They were to him strangers in whom he felt interest only, because upon them the Master had wrought a great miracle. He glanced casually at the figure of the little woman over by the white rock, standing there her face hidden in her hands.

“As the Lord liveth, it is Amrah!” he said to himself. “Amrah! Amrah, what do you here?”

She rushed forward, and fell upon her knees before him, blinded by her tears, nigh speechless with contending joy and fear.

“O master, master? Thy God and mine, how good He is!”

Something—he knew not what—made him look once more at the woman he had passed. Could he be mistaken? Never was there in life a stranger so like his mother. Scarcely believing his senses, he laid his hand upon the servant's head, and asked, tremulously:

“Amrah, Amrah—my mother! Tirzah! tell me if I see aright.”

“Speak to them, O master, speak to them!” she said.

He waited no longer, but ran, with outstretched arms, crying: “Mother! Mother! Tirzah! Here I am!”

They heard his call, and with a cry as loving, started to meet him. Suddenly the mother stopped, drew back, and uttered the old alarm:

“Stay, Judah, my son; come not nearer. Unclean, unclean!”

Though they were healed in person, the taint of the scourge might be in their garments. He had no such thought. They were before him; he had called them, they had answered. Who or what should keep them from him now? Next moment the three, so long separated, were mingling their tears in each other's arms.

[“Mother,” Ben-Hur said at last, “Who think you He is?”

“The Messiah,” she answered simply.

“Eight years ago,” Ben-Hur said then, “when they dragged me a prisoner—half-fainting—through the village of Nazareth, He alone took pity on me. And now He has given you back

to me from the dead. For eight years I have lived only for vengeance, but He has taught me that Blessed are the merciful."

.

What more is there to tell? Only this. The miracle wrought upon his people convinced Ben-Hur that the Nazarene was the Christ. He lingered in Jerusalem until the Master had been put to death, then, taking his mother and Tirzah with him, made his way back to Antioch, to the house of Simonides; and a few months later Esther became his wife.

As for Sheik Ilderim, he was killed in a battle against the Parthians, leaving to Ben-Hur the Orchard of Palms, in remembrance of that glorious day when in the Circus of Antioch he drove the wondrous four to victory.]

THE END

SELF-STUDY EXERCISES

(PAGES 1-45)

1. Describe in your own words, shortly and simply, the state of Jerusalem when the story of *Ben-Hur* begins.

2. (a) What picture have you in your mind of a Roman soldier?

(b) What was a "cohort of legionaries"?

3. Describe the dress of Ben-Hur and of Messala. How could you have told merely by looking at them that one was a Jew and the other a Roman?

4. What do you know of the religion of the Jews and of the Romans?

5. Give a description of Ben-Hur's house: if you had seen a picture of it, how would you have known it was an Eastern house?

6. Explain the following: "The language in which the loved Rebekah and Rachel sang to Benjamin"; "The Captivity"; "I wait for Miriam and the women who went after her dancing and singing." And to whom do the following refer: (a) Warrior, poet, orator, lawgiver; (b) the son of Jesse and his son; (c) the Tishbite.

7. Give a short account of the talk between Ben-Hur and Messala. How did Ben-Hur's mother afterwards restore his belief in his own people?

8. Having read as far as page 41, what is your idea of the character of Ben-Hur and of Messala?

9. Imagine yourself to be Ben-Hur standing upon the housetop, and describe the procession of Valerius Gratus as he saw it.

10. Tell the story of the accident as one of the Roman soldiers might have told it.

11. Why in olden days did every village have a well? What is a well like? If you can, make a rough drawing to illustrate your description.

12. Describe the coming of Rabbi Joseph and his son. They were carpenters: what picture have you in your mind of a carpenter's shop?

13. The decurion told Rabbi Joseph that Ben-Hur had been sentenced to "the galleys for life." What exactly did this mean?

14. Tell in your own words the story of Ben-Hur to the end of Chapter VI.

(PAGES 46-82)

15. What picture do the words "a Roman galley" bring before your mind? Describe the galley of Quintus Arrius (*a*) as Ben-Hur first saw it from the sea-shore; (*b*) as he saw it from his rower's bench.

16. The following are all sea-terms: find out their meaning from your dictionary: (*a*) watch; (*b*) hatchway; (*c*) yard; (*d*) tack; (*e*) astern; (*f*) look-out; (*g*) bulwark; (*h*) aft.

17. Explain: stanchion, javelin, feathering, stylus, tribune, gladiator.

18. (*a*) What does the writer of this story mean when he says the rowers' benches illustrated "both the

policy and the prowess of Rome"? (b) From what countries did the following come: a Gaul; an Athenian; a red-haired savage from Hibernia?

19. Quintus Arrius offered prayers to Jove and Neptune: why, particularly to Neptune?

20. Draw a map of the Mediterranean Sea, showing upon it the course of the galley from its start from Misenum (which stood close by Naples) to its meeting with the pirates. (Cythera is now called Cerigo, and Naxos, Naxo).

21. In many towns, the remains of Roman buildings have been discovered. Do you know of any that show that Quintus Arrius spoke the truth when he said that Ben-Hur was like a Roman because he was cleaner than his companions.

22. Quintus Arrius "surveyed Ben-Hur admiringly, and with the thought of the arena." What does this mean? What do you know of the Arena and of the sights that were seen there?

23. To what town did Quintus Arrius refer when he spoke of his ship being in the river by Londinium?

24. In galleys like that of Quintus Arrius, Cæsar came to Britain: what did ships depend upon for movement when they ceased to use oars? What do modern ships move by?

25. Imagine yourself to be Ben-Hur and describe the battle with the pirates as he first heard, and afterwards, saw it.

26. What example have you in the battle of Roman discipline? Do you know a very famous example in history (of which at least one picture has been painted) of a Roman soldier refusing to leave his post?

27. What did Quintus Arrius mean when he said "It cannot be that thou hast not heard of Cato and Brutus"? And what did Ben-Hur mean when he answered, "Thy Cato and Brutus were as little children compared to the Hebrew *whose law a Jew must obey*"?

28. In what play of Shakespeare's does Brutus appear? Look up the scene of his death: what did he mean by saying

I shall have glory by this losing day
More than Octavius and Mark Antony
By this vile conquest . . .

29. By what sign did Quintus Arrius know the galley bearing down upon him and Ben-Hur was a Roman? How can you tell to-day to what nation a ship belongs?

30. Tell the story of Ben-Hur's rescue of Arrius, as he himself might have afterwards told it to his mother and sister.

(PAGES 83-159)

31. Take your map of the Mediterranean Sea, and mark in Antioch.

32. What did the Hebrew mean when he said "The procurator cured his hurt with a golden salve"? Who was Tiberius?

33. How did the sailors of Simonides signal to each other that they had had a good voyage? How do modern ships signal to each other?

34. Describe as fully as you can the house of Simonides and its surroundings.

35. Quote from the text to show that Simonides did in reality recognise Ben-Hur. Why did he refuse to acknowledge him?

36. What was the usual greeting between one Jew and another?

37. What is a Stadium? Mention any other Roman words you know that have become part of our English language.

38. When Malluch met Ben-Hur in the forest, how did he know he was not a Roman? Would you have known?

39. Describe the coming of Messala as Ben-Hur saw it from the stand.

40. What did Ben-Hur mean when he said "The winners in the Circus Maximus have held their crowns these three years at my will"?

41. Messala purposely takes a great many words to tell a plain story: show by re-writing his letter how much more directly he could have told Valerius Gratus his news.

42. Take your map of the Mediterranean Sea once again, and mark the position of Cæsarea; then trace the journey Messala's two messengers (the one by sea, the other by land) made before they could place his letter in the hands of Valerius Gratus.

43. Messala and Ben-Hur have now grown to be men: do you think their characters have in any way altered since their talk in the Palace garden at Jerusalem?

44. What were the names of Sheik Ilderim's horses, and after what were they christened? What did the Sheik mean when he said "They are under yoke for the first time"?

45. Give a short account of how Ben-Hur trained his horses for the race. To whom did he speak "not as master, but as the senior of so many brothers"?

46. Prove that Simonides, though at first he denied Ben-Hur's claim, had in reality served him faithfully through many years. Why could not Ben-Hur give him his freedom?

47. (a) What were the colours of Ben-Hur and of Messala for the race? (b) How many chariots entered for it? (c) What was the prize? (d) How was the score kept?

48. Name three Roman coins that have been mentioned in the story of "Ben-Hur". Which was it that Messala called "coin of cartmen and butchers"?

49. Make a rough drawing of the race-course, and show how Ben-Hur, having yielded the wall to Messala, cut across to his right; then turned in behind him, and finally overtook him.

50. What is meant by: "consulted his tablets"; "Messala was more than antagonist to him"; "the dog throws all his weight on the bits"; "Malluch found it hard to keep his cheer"; "the effort ended in promise"; "more than one altar was richer of his vows"?

51. Give an account of the chariot race (1) as Esther saw it. (2) As Ben-Hur felt it. (3) As Messala felt it.

52. Do you think Ben-Hur was right to take so terrible a vengeance?

(PAGES 160-176)

53. Why after so many years could Ben-Hur return in safety to Jerusalem?

54. Describe Ben-Hur's house as he found it on his return, and compare its state then with its appearance upon the day he parted from Messala in the Palace garden.

55. Tell the story of Tirzah's home-coming as she herself might afterwards have told it to her brother.

56. Give an account of Amrah's meeting with her mistress. What was the meaning of the lepers' cry "Unclean! Unclean!"

57. Where had Ben-Hur seen the Messiah before?

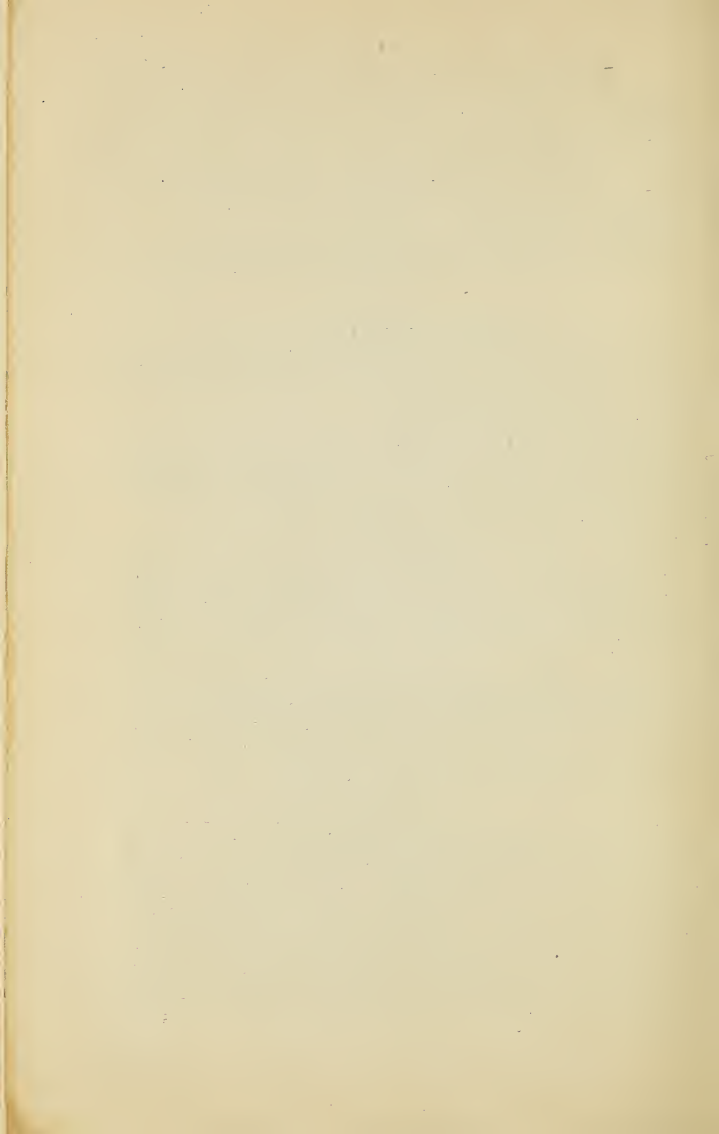
(PAGES 1-176)

58. Suppose you had been asked to illustrate *Ben-Hur*, would you have chosen the pictures given here, or others? If so, why?

59. If you had been asked to make a cinema story from the book of *Ben-Hur*, give a list of the characters you would use for it, and pick out the scenes by which you would tell the story by pictures.

60. When and by whom were the following said: (a) Under the trampling of the Romans, the earth trembles like a floor beaten with flails. (b) Why may not a son of Israel do all a Roman may? (c) Down Eros! Up Mars! (d) Perhaps I do but play with thee. (e) Is thy witness in writing or cometh it in person? (f) The wine is of the country we all so love. Drink, I pray thee! (g) If you will cook the meal with words, I will promise an ocean of butter.

61. To whom do the following descriptions refer: (a) white hair which dropped in thin locks over the white brows, deepening the blackness of the eyes shining through them like sullen lights. (b) round chin, full eyes, and oval cheeks, reddened with a wine-like glow, gave his face the softness, strength and beauty peculiar to his race. (c) his forehead was high and narrow, his nose sharp and aquiline, while his lips were thin and straight, and his eyes cold and close under the brows.



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